







Elsie Opp

# THE POOL OF MEMORY

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MEMOIRS

*by*

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

LONDON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON LTD.



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*This lightly-told story of our lives together  
is dedicated to*

## MY WIFE ELSIE

*who has been my constant and joyous companion  
through many happy years,  
and, with indomitable courage and unabated cheerfulness,  
is now treading with me in still fervent companionship  
the less flowery paths of a grimmer life*

BROCKENHURST

JULY 1941



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## CHAPTER ONE

### *Shivering Reminiscences*

ON a certain afternoon towards the end of July 1883, a tousled-haired, insignificant-looking youth with a prematurely developed stoop of the shoulders was ushered into the study of the head master of the Wyggeston Grammar School, Leicester. The head master's name was the Reverend James Went, since Canon and afterwards Dean. The youth was myself. The occasion was my farewell. The head master coughed. He was a kindly man and he seemed to find that valedictory speech difficult. He was an occasional visitor at my father's house, and he addressed me now by my Christian name.

"I understand, Phillips," he said, "that you are leaving at the end of the term."

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't it a little early? How old are you?"

"Sixteen, sir," I replied.

"A little early, surely?" he repeated. "I understood that you would be here until next Easter. What about the Matric?"

"I could pass the Matric tomorrow, sir," I told him, "except for mathematics, and if I were to stay here for the rest of my life I should never be able to pass that."

"Is that the reason you are leaving?"

"No, sir."

As always, I was terribly nervous with the head master, whom I both feared and loved. He had a commanding personality, and although a kind-hearted man, he had, more than anyone I ever remember, the gift of

inspiring a certain sense of fear, almost of awe, in the wrongdoer.

"I don't suppose," he suggested, opening a drawer of his desk and producing a torn scrap of foolscap, "that this has anything to do with your departure?"

I looked at those hastily scrawled lines in horror. Perhaps he guessed how I was feeling, for he let me down lightly.

"Anything to do with you, these lines?" he asked, passing the scrap of paper over to me.

I tried to answer him and came to grief. It was only the twinkle in his dark eyes at that moment which saved me from bolting out of the room.

"Read that out," he ordered.

I had to do it, but my voice was a fair imitation of a frightened squirrel's :

"Jimmy's nose is long, Jimmy's nose is strong,  
'Twould be no disgrace to Jimmy's face,  
If half his nose were gone."

As I came to the end I looked fearfully up. To my immense relief there was a smile upon the head master's face.

"I am very sorry, sir," I faltered.

"Give me back the lines," he said. "I'm going to show them to Mrs. Went. Perhaps you devote your time to writing poetry when you ought to be studying mathematics?"

"But that isn't poetry, sir," I ventured.

"What is it, then?"

"Doggerel."

He took the scrap of paper from my fingers, twisted it up and thrust it into the pocket of his waistcoat. Why I should remember all these years later that the waistcoat was of black silk, I cannot imagine!

"If you had been staying," he said, "I should have had to give you five hundred lines for that. Disrespect to the Head, you know."

"I'll do the five hundred lines before I go, sir," I offered.

He shook his head.

"Any other reason for your leaving?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. My father has lost a great deal of money and he says I must go to work."

"Sorry to hear that. What business is your father in?"

"He is a leather merchant, sir."

"And how are you helping him by leaving school so early?"

"I don't know, sir," I confessed. "I suppose I shall have to do my best."

The head master played for a minute or two with his jet-black whiskers. He was in a way a nervous man himself, and even when he was giving the Sixth Form a lesson in classics, which he did occasionally, he found it impossible to stand still.

"Well, if your father wishes it," he said, "naturally you must go. You are rather a difficult case for a Sixth Form boy," he went on. "Your general conduct seems to have been quite up to the average. You have been useful to us in the cricket field, of course, and I understood that you were going to captain the football team next season. Your mathematics master, however, gives me a shocking report of your work and you don't seem to have taken any interest in anything except English literature. By the by, didn't you win the 'Canon Vaughan' history prize?"

"Honourable mention, sir, and second prize."

He nodded.

"If you are really fond of reading, here is a little farewell present for you that may be of interest."

He handed me a volume which I was far too nervous to examine at that moment but which I found afterwards was a copy of Augustine Birrell's *Obiter Dicta*, a kind of text-book of contemporary literature which, with its successor, *Res Judicata*, which I bought many years later,

was my chief literary treasure for some years. At that moment I very nearly opened my lips and made my confession. I very nearly told the Head of the four hundred pages of foolscap on which was scrawled, on one side of the paper only, and with a wide margin, the sketch of my first novel. I lacked the courage, however. I hugged my volume and only wished I could find the courage to get away to look inside it.

"I hope," the head master concluded in more formal fashion, "that you will find a place for yourself in the world and that your father will do better in the future and be able to help you, for I really cannot think of any profession in life in which you would be likely to earn your own living. Not even as a poet. I wish you well, all the same, my lad, and tell your father I am very sorry to hear of his misfortune."

A shake of the hand and out I went. Just over forty years later, at the age of fifty-seven, I was the first Old Wyggestonian invited to give away the prizes at the school which I certainly left without any distinction. The Reverend Canon Went—the same head master—then approaching eighty years of age, sat on my right, the Mayor of the city on my left. There were some two thousand people present, including some eight hundred scholars. I told them the story of my school career and I repeated the head master's farewell speech, informing them all at the same time that the week before I had published my fifty-fifth novel. The head master himself, his colleagues now trebled in number, and the distinguished little group upon the platform, amongst whom was my wife, seated by the side of the Mayoress, seemed to enjoy the incident. The boys enjoyed even more my getting one back on the Head.

A terribly personal reminiscence this, but with the same head master in office, the same chairman on the governing board of directors and the memory of that little farewell

speech still in my mind, the incident seemed to have just that flavour of the unusual to warrant its finding a place here.

The more I look back upon the early period of my life after I left school, the more I realise how small a claim I have upon the sympathies of that kind-hearted portion of the public who like to read of a materially successful autumn to a life of struggling and privation. I have really had nothing of the sort to face. All that I can claim is that from the moment I entered my father's business until I abandoned commercial pursuits altogether, I worked a great deal harder than seems to be the custom with the youth of the present generation. Eight or nine hours of every day were given to my efforts in the leather business, of which I grew sometimes very weary. Practically every evening, often until two o'clock in the morning, I was writing. I must have been an exceedingly secretive person in those days, for neither my father nor my mother had any idea, for several years after I left school, why I chose to spend every possible spare moment in the box-room adjoining my bedroom, why I had a small writing-table moved into it and what my somewhat voluminous correspondence was all about. At last, my father, who was a very human person and disliked my frequent absences from the evening meal, marched up into my room one night. The floor was strewn with pages of foolscap and a great pile of it was spread all over the table. I confessed that I had written a novel and spent my time continually altering it to meet the criticisms of the publishers to whom it had been sent. My father, and of course my mother, who had to be let into the secret, were both sympathetic, and my father, who wrote better English than I have ever done and had received a much more ambitious education, insisted promptly upon reading the story. His better English was a great help and my mother's knowledge of a world of which I had seen little was also useful.

The time came when we sent the story out again on its travels. The firm who had been the most useful in their criticisms was Bentley's, and to them I sent it—every word of the one hundred thousand having been written and re-written some three or four times by hand. Back it came, with a sorrowful but definite rejection. I sent it then upon what I decided should be its last journey—to J. & R. Maxwell. They replied almost by return, asking me to call and see them sometime when I was passing. There was a certain amount of humour in this suggestion as I had only been to London twice within my memory, on each occasion with an excursion ticket. I was interviewed by one of the partners, who, after a few pleasant words, told me they would feel justified in publishing the book on certain terms, which were that I should pay one-third of the cost of production. I explained my circumstances, without, however, mentioning the fact that I had borrowed the eight shillings and three-halfpence for my third-class railway ticket. The interest of the firm in my visit was materially lessened, but Mr. Maxwell (I learnt afterwards that he was the husband of Miss Braddon) promised to talk the matter over with his partners and if they thought any other offer was possible I should hear from them.

I left the place feeling pretty miserable but yet rather elated by the fact that I had actually sat in a publisher's office and talked to a live publisher. I took the bus back to St. Pancras and sat in the waiting-room until the next train went to Leicester.

My news was received by the family with gloom. Only my mother was still optimistic. She pointed out that they had not returned the story and only laughed at my suggestion that they wished to spare me the humiliation of leaving the place with a brown-paper parcel under my arm. In a sense she was right, however, for the next day I had a letter from the firm offering to accept a considerably reduced sum as my share of the expenses of

production. It was still more than I could afford so I never even mentioned the letter. In the end my father got hold of it and, although he said very little at the time, within a week he produced the necessary amount. Although he would never plead guilty to it, I shrewdly suspect to this day he had borrowed from one of the friends of his more affluent days. At any rate, the book was produced, *Expiation* was the title, and sold enough copies to pay for itself. Long before the time of the first statement, however, I had been able to repay the amount from the sale of short serials and stories to the *Leicester Mercury*, the *Whitehall Review* and *Truth*. The only thing that I remember about *Expiation* is that the *Athenaeum* condescended to give it a brief review, the concluding sentence of which I have remembered all my life : " This is the type of story that Mr. James Payne used to produce before he, fortunately for his readers, discovered that he possessed a sense of humour."

## CHAPTER TWO

### *I begin to stand upon my Feet*

I WAS about twenty-two years old when there was what is called “a boom” in the leather trade and we really made a certain amount of money. I gave up some of my too strenuous work, joined a cricket club, went for long walks in the country on Sundays and finally took a four-roomed cottage in Woodhouse Eaves, a picturesque village in Leicestershire, afterwards the scene of one of my later novels. I had a four-mile walk every morning and every evening, motor-cars in those days being unknown and safety-bicycles a rarity. I made friends with a man named Cheshire—the local curate—and he invited me to share his cottage. He had a well-stocked library, shared my enthusiasm for the poems of Tennyson and Matthew Arnold and was altogether a very pleasant and agreeable companion.

A theatre owner in Leicester, a man of means, Mr. Elliot Galer, who had written several melodramas, dramatised *Expiation*, took me up to London and proposed me at the Savage Club, which in those days and many subsequent ones was a great joy to me.

The *Weekly Telegraph* of Sheffield wrote and asked me to go and see them. I remember having lunch with Sir Christopher Leng at his club and going away with a contract in my pocket for the serial rights of six full-length novels for two hundred and fifty pounds each and, what was more important to me than anything at the time, a cheque for one hundred pounds on account. I took things a little more lightly and began to travel. Life was really very uneventful in those days, without anything

happening and a good deal of drudgery to be got through. One or two of the stories written for the *Weekly Telegraph* found their way into publication in volume form, and one of them, *False Evidence*, published in various editions, brought me in quite a reasonable amount of money.

Then Fisher Unwin accepted *A Modern Prometheus* for his Pseudonym Series and, immediately after that, Bentley's accepted a longer and more ambitious novel entitled *The Mystery of Mr. Bernard Brown*. This, however, had very little success, although I was not asked to contribute towards the cost of its production. It brought me in a very small sum of money and soon dropped out of print.

It was about this time that my father, who had always been of an adventurous turn of mind, persuaded me to extend my travels to the United States. American competition was having a very serious effect upon the trade for dressed leathers and sole leathers in England and practically three parts of the material used in the manufacture of boots and shoes was coming from that country. I hesitated for some time because I did not consider that we had enough capital to open up connections with the American exporters, but for the first time our small business was showing signs of a decline, so I embarked upon the *Scythia*, a 4000-ton, old-fashioned steamer which sailed from Liverpool to Boston.

One's first ocean voyage is always an amazing experience in imaginative youth and it certainly had its effect upon me. I took stock of life, so far as it had gone, in those quiet nights lying on deck, and I am thankful to say that a too great equanimity of disposition was disturbed. I became dissatisfied with life. I thought of the stories I had written and I remembered what was an undoubted fact—that before I put pen to paper, especially with regard to my later stories, I had drifted into the habit of studiously dragging into the forefront of my mind all the advice I had received from either the editors or the publishers with whom I had talked ; or, what was worse

still, I had dwelt upon the mechanism of other stories I had read. I remembered one sound piece of advice I had received from a well-known writer of that day. One afternoon, lounging in one of the Savage Club easy-chairs, he took his pipe out of his mouth and waved it at me : " My lad," he said, " don't strive so much after the unusual. Write about the things you see that happen every day, the people you meet every day and your own feelings about them. Make your characters live and they will tell their own story."

I looked over some of my work and was disheartened. Before I had reached Boston I had almost made up my mind to throw myself life and soul into a great commercial effort, to try to build up a big business, to make use of my letters of introduction to the fullest extent and not write another line until I had felt my way a little further into life. I realised well that I was in danger of becoming a huckster of plots—ready-made plots, too, even if they were my own—rather than building up any connection, real or fancied, with literature. I threw the only copy I had of *Expiation* into the sea. I threw overboard most of the manuscript of the work I was engaged upon. I realised that if I had sold it as a story, it was only because it was sensational enough to whet the unnatural appetite for a type of fiction that was just then the vogue, but which could never by any chance flourish. I thought a little bitterly of those long nights I had spent when only a schoolboy, making far more sincere efforts to create new ideas. " One must live before one can write"—you will find that somewhere in *Obiter Dicta*, and it is quite a true saying. I decided that whilst I was in America I would think of nothing except my business, that I would not call upon a single publisher or present a single card of introduction. I kept my word. I returned to England in a couple of months' time having made some valuable connections in the world of commerce, kept zealously to my promises with regard to my work

but having definitely broken all my earlier vows and committed the one glorious indiscretion of marriage. In other words, I brought home with me from Boston a wife—an event which I have never regretted for even forty-five minutes of the forty-five years we have spent together.

Very happy days those were, but of little interest, I am afraid, to the readers of these Memoirs. I bought a small country house about eight miles from Leicester with a pleasant garden and very few neighbours. I went backwards and forwards to Leicester every day except on Sundays, became a sidesman at the Parish Church, played cricket for the village and only avoided occupying the post of secretary to the local tennis club through the intercession of my wife, who was and is a very sensible woman. Nine hours in Leicester, eight hours in bed—and I slept like a top in those days—and practically every minute of the remaining seven hours in my study. Very soon indeed I was to congratulate myself upon those hours of thought upon the Atlantic. *Mysterious Mr. Sabin* appeared about two years after my marriage, the first of my long series of stories dealing with that shadowy and mysterious world of diplomacy. As my love of story-writing grew, I ventured into many other fields, but every now and then I returned with new zest to that particular type of work. I knew little enough of my subject at that time, but during the forty-three years which have passed since *Mysterious Mr. Sabin* appeared, I have never missed a chance, wherever I may have been travelling, of adding to my stock of knowledge. In these days when kingdoms have melted away, countries faded off the map and the face of the known civilised world is so strangely altered, the rules of the game have undergone a great change. Yet even today, the same elements of interest prevail. One has to seek them through different paths, but they still beckon. . . .

The success of *Mysterious Mr. Sabin*, which opened out

life for me very considerably, made me more than ever determined to break away as soon as I could from the cares of a business in which I had no real interest. Unfortunately, it was just at this period that I had the misfortune to lose my father, who died quite suddenly of pneumonia. It was a great shock to me, for although I put in a great many hours of work, he was always a far better and shrewder business man than I. His earlier misfortune, during which he had lost a great deal of what was known as "the family money," was simply due to lack of caution and to one or two strokes of exceedingly bad luck. Anyway, the thing had to be faced. There was the business, which produced a small income provided it was carefully looked after, and my mother and sister to arrange for. I was earning enough now by my stories to dispense with any part of that income, if necessary. I went steadily to work with one idea in my mind—to sell out to a larger firm.

I stuck at that for two years without any success. Then I had an idea. My cashier and traveller were both men of good reputation and apparently popular with our clientèle and I offered to let them run the business for six months while I took a very much-needed rest, providing them with the capital necessary. They accepted my offer and I kept my overdue promise to my wife and we sailed for the States. A wonderful voyage ! I had always been fond of the sea ; we were again on a very small boat, which took twelve days to get to Boston, and every minute of it seemed wonderful. We won the championship of the boat at shuffleboard, defeating the captain and his lady friend in the final, which was played out by the light of oil lamps. I have always been fond of games. I have made my hundred at cricket once or twice, I have won some very tough sets of tennis, and I have a small collection of silver bowls—golf prizes—but I never remember anything like the thrill of the last stroke which decided that shuffleboard championship. I will

not say who made it, but it changed a lead of fourteen to a minus of seven, gave us the match, the championship ribbon—of which they were very proud in those days—and champagne at the captain's table, champagne being an exceedingly rare luxury. The whole voyage was a luxury unattainable today. There was no wireless, no telephone, no possible way of getting any sort of news. We just lobbed along at about eleven knots, and whereas speed may be one of the wonders of the world, slow progress is one of the sweetest sedatives. Except for one incident our tour was a great success. The misadventures which arose were laughed at. There was a fair on in Chicago, and as we had not reached that stage in life when it is almost necessary to spend money to secure enjoyment, we bought cheap tourist tickets, including hotel accommodation, which guaranteed to deliver us in Chicago in twenty-seven hours. We were rather scared when we saw the train, but still we knew nothing of luxurious travelling. We got into it—we had no thought of the route—we were taken up to Canada, shaken and rattled half to death, left on a siding, absolutely and entirely forgotten for a day and a half and reached Chicago black as natives—the supply of water having run out—aching in every limb, hungry and thirsty, at the end of the third day. We recovered our luggage with great difficulty, it having been subjected to the check system, chartered a buggy, which looked the cheapest vehicle in the station yard, gave the driver the address and started on a loathsome pilgrimage of about two hours to a flat piece of waste land on the outskirts of the fair. Our driver, with a grin which I shall never forget, pointed with his whip a short distance ahead.

“Say, you folks will have to look somewhere else. That's the Algonquin Hotel.”

The hotel had been burnt down in the night and was still smouldering. We never got a penny back on our tickets and we finally found ourselves in the most expen-

sive hotel in Chicago, installed in a very luxurious suite at a price which made our bank roll look extraordinarily silly.

For the rest, the exhibition was fun. No one thought of walking. We were trundled about in some vehicle between a perambulator and a bath-chair by college students who earned their fees in that and many other strange fashions during the holiday season. I cannot at the present moment remember a single thing in that fair except the scenic railways, for which my wife had a special weakness and before most of which we stopped and risked our lives at a quarter a time.

On the second morning of our stay in Chicago, I broke a solemn promise to myself. I took the manuscript of a novel that was being produced that day in England into the office of a publisher, as I thought, of repute. My card was taken to the head of the firm and he welcomed me effusively. I told him that although I knew that there was no copyright in novels, it had been suggested that the better class American publishers preferred to have their manuscript direct from the author and to pay a small fee rather than wait until the book was produced and commit an act of piracy. My host seemed very hurt at my suggestion. He assured me that they never touched that class of business. Any book published in England which they thought would appeal to the American public, they were always ready to pay a reasonable sum for and produce, notwithstanding the copyright bill. I told him I was only in Chicago for three more days and the manuscript was not a short one, but he laughed that to scorn. He took the manuscript from underneath my arm, placed it in a roll-top desk which he carefully locked, and took me out into a neighbouring bar, where I drank my first cocktail. The cocktail was good.

On the third day, when I was to lunch with the publisher and receive his report on the manuscript and, I hoped, a cheque, I called at the appointed time but there

was a general air of vagueness about the whole establishment. One man went to another asking for the boss without any result. Finally, they were obliged to admit that they fancied he had slipped out for the day or was down at his country place. I explained the circumstances and said my return ticket was up the next day and was there anyone else I could see? There was no one else. I never saw him again, and I never got a penny from his American edition of my book, which was published a few days later.

Yet this trip was, after all, successful in accomplishing what had been for the last two years the desire of my life. In New York I called at the office of the largest manufacturers of a certain type of leather in America, with whom I had had slight dealings resulting from my former visit. I was shown into a palatial office where a man who looked to me very little older than myself was seated in a comfortable chair testing and balancing a succession of polo sticks which a servant was holding out to him. He paused in his task when he heard my name and looked at me steadily for a moment. I have never quite forgotten that first meeting with Julian Stevens Ullman. His eyes were keen and hard, his voice was positively unpleasant. He paused with one of the implements in his hand.

"Your name Oppenheim?" he asked.

I assented.

"I saw Mr. Halley last time I was here and Mr. Cecil Blumenthal," I told him.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Are you the fellow who wrote that book *Mysterious Mr. Sabin* I've just finished reading?"

"Yes, that's my story," I admitted.

He summoned me to the desk and shook hands.

"How long are you over here for?" he asked.  
"Where are you staying?"

"I have been staying in Boston," I told him, "with

my wife's people. We are going to stay here at——”

“Never mind where you think you are going to stay,” he interrupted. “You and the rest of you—whoever they may be—are coming right out to my country place. Get there in time for lunch, if you put some things together quickly. I'm playing polo this afternoon. Afterwards my wife will get a few people in for dinner.”

“That is very kind of you——” I began rather hesitatingly.

“Nothing of the sort,” he broke in. “You know what they say about me, Mr. Oppenheim,” he added, and suddenly he smiled and his face was completely changed. “I am the man who always gets his own way. I have been waiting to meet you for ages. We've got to fix this up. I'll send a car round for your wife, or whoever is with you, if you will tell me where she is to be found.”

“My wife is meeting a school friend at the Waldorf Astoria,” I explained.

“Good. I'll send a car round at once, or listen—you'd better go and fetch her. No, better still, I'll come with you. Any one of those will do, Jonas,” he added, turning to the man. “Tell Charles to bring the other car round to the Waldorf. I'll drive this gentleman in the Packard.”

I am putting in so much of the conversation in order to give an impression of what Stevens Ullman was like. He had all the qualities which should have lain apart but didn't. He was kind, he was stern, he was generous and, if he wanted to, he could be mean. He would hurt the feelings of anyone he disliked with pleasure, but nothing would make him say an unkind word to anyone he cared for. He was my friend from that day until the day of his death some fifteen years ago.

The rest of that day seems to me even now unbeliev-

able. We were transported with a wave of effortless good-humour into a world of luxury and light-heartedness. We dined with twenty-eight other guests out of doors with a fountain playing, and around a huge swimming-pool lit with fairy lights. My wife drank her first cocktail and I my second. Everyone was gracious and seemed delighted to say nice things. We had invitations showered upon us, we slept in an exquisitely furnished suite with servants of our own to attend upon us. We played tennis the next day, we swam, we were driven to other wonderful houses ; everyone wanted to entertain us, everybody was delighted. There was an ambassador there from mid-Europe whom I was to know a great deal better in years to come and who gave me very many valuable political tips, and a diplomat from Washington. It was not until our last morning that Ullman asked me a question about my business.

“ Still got that little leather business of yours, Phillips ? ” he enquired.

“ I’m trying to get rid of it,” I told him.

“ I can’t think why you ever started in it with a gift like yours. Waste of time ! ” he scoffed.

I told him the whole story.

“ You want to sell it, then—really ? ”

“ I do,” I assured him. “ That is the one thing I am hoping for in life.”

“ I’ll buy it,” he suggested, in that curt offhand tone.

“ I’ll buy it, Phillips. We’ll make it a branch, one of our distributing branches. Leicester and Norwich are great centres for our stuff. Write down the address in Leicester.”

I wrote it down, my fingers trembling all the time.

“ I’ll send our chief accountant down from London in less than a week. He will go into the figures and we will fix it up in less than a month’s time. I shall be at Claridge’s on the 1st of October. We will have a little dinner there to celebrate.”

“ I only hope you are in earnest,” I ventured.

"I am in earnest all right. We've bought two other businesses lately, one in Germany and one in Czechoslovakia, just the same way. The only thing is, you may have to stop on for a time. Good salary, of course. Liberal expenses. I would like to take you over to some of our branches on the Continent during the autumn. We'll talk of that later. By the by, I changed your seats for Boston. Servants are there and your luggage at the entrance."

He held out his hand. I had scarcely time to say good-bye before he had dashed off. I must have given a very good impression of a drunken man as I entered the station and made my way down to where the train was waiting. My wife was already installed in a private coupé, and for the first time in my life I realised what it means when an American millionaire sends flowers.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Golf, Poker, Mark Hambourg and the Police Court*

THE next few years, although without a doubt the busiest, were perhaps almost the happiest of my life. Julian Ullman was as good as his word. He bought my business, notwithstanding the fact that when I got back I found to my horror the two young men I had left in charge had made some unfortunate losses, the burden of which I, of course, had to bear. I became a director of the Leicester branch at a generous salary and found myself, for the first time, free from the constant pressure of financial responsibility. I was able to walk through life making fresh plans all the time, dreaming fresh stories and yet with a hard, matter-of-fact occupation to keep my feet on the ground. I had a season ticket on the old Midland Railway between Leicester, London and Norwich. I lived in Norfolk, which has always been my favourite county, in the then old-fashioned village of Sheringham. I spent my time—a few days at home at my story-writing, a few days at Leicester at the old business, and more than a few days going backwards and forwards between London and Paris and every now and then accompanying Julian Ullman on some of his Continental expeditions. I was all the time meeting interesting people. One morning in Paris I had a telephone message at half-past twelve from Julian.

“Put on your best clothes and come to the Ritz for lunch at one o'clock to meet one of my old friends.”

I arrived a little late for introductions, but my host's guest of honour, a very charming middle-aged lady with

a delightful flow of conversation, having heard from a neighbour that I was the author of a story of which she happened to have read a criticism in a newspaper that morning, sent for me to sit beside her. I tried to look at her name-card but she hadn't one, and the "Madam," which seemed to be the correct form of address, revealed nothing to my inexperience. We talked of books for a time, then she asked me in what part of England I lived. I told her Norfolk.

"I stay sometimes," she confided, "with some neighbours of yours. We must meet."

My tentative question elicited the fact that the neighbours she referred to were the King and Queen at Sandringham. The lady who was chatting so pleasantly to me was the Infanta of Spain, who had already written a very brilliant volume of reminiscences, a copy of which I received the next morning. I guarded it jealously for many years, for it was the first inscribed volume I had ever received from a self-acknowledged fellow author.

I was whisked off to Frankfort some weeks later and enjoyed my first experience of German hospitality. We were guests of the Mayor on New Year's Eve in a magnificent mansion somewhere in the heart of the city. Twenty-six people sat down at table to more food than I had ever seen in my life, and there were twenty-six maidservants in the room, each in the charming costume of the country district—pink with white caps and aprons. The number of maidservants, my hostess's daughter told me, varied according to the number of guests. There was only one manservant, a wine butler. My host, Rudolf Hirsch by name—who spoke little English but wanted to be kind to me, sent on a special salver a bottle of Veuve Clicquot rosée 1884. He half rose from his seat as I drank his wife's health. I would have filled her glass—she was beside me—but he shook his fist at me.

" Every drop for you—the whole bottle ! "

And nothing that I could do or plead was of any avail. The contents of the whole bottle, with the exception of a single glass, which I managed to smuggle across the table, I drank. It was the finest wine I have ever tasted, and I felt none the worse for it.

After dinner we danced, and within an hour there was placed in the middle of the dancing-floor a trestle table on which were set two barrels of beer, the barrels made of some sort of highly polished wood, with silver bands and taps. Everyone gathered round and more toasts were drunk. I danced afterwards the old-fashioned waltz, as we call it now, with my host's daughter—a charming girl who later married the Russian Ambassador—and I remember her telling me that she never dreamed an Englishman could be so light on his feet. My wife, too, who was with us on that occasion—a great success with all the guests—told me the same thing. I know that I felt uncommonly light in the head !

Afterwards to Florence, where Ullman left us and went on to stay at Bucharest with his sister, who had married the American Minister to Rumania, and I went to the Villa Strozzi, one of the most magnificent of the ancient Italian palaces, to stay with some friends of my wife. My host, who afterwards became an intimate friend, was Harry Dearberg, an Englishman and the largest manufacturer of straw hats on the Continent. Lulie Dearberg was an old school friend of my wife, a very witty and brilliant woman and a well-known figure in Florentine society.

I had some little reputation as a golfer in those days, and my host, who was president of the Florence golf club and terribly keen on the game, offered to motor us to Rome by way of the hill towns if I would play for Florence in the impending match against Rome and enter for the Italian championship which was to take place that week.

Needless to say, I accepted. Motoring itself was an entire novelty in those days and Italy was an unknown country to me. We slept on the way at Siena, Perugia and Orvieto. It is a well-known itinerary, and I will only say that to me the journey was a dream of enchantment.

On the first morning of our arrival in Rome, I was awokened at seven o'clock by my friends' servant. My orders were to get up at once and come to the golf club, as the inter-club match started at nine o'clock. I looked wistfully through my window at the dome of St. Peter's, but naturally I obeyed. I won my single in the morning and, having a very good partner in the foursomes, we also won in the afternoon. Unfortunately, however, the period between luncheon and starting out for the foursomes had been so lengthy, owing to the hospitality of our hosts, that it was dark when we got back to Rome. Instead of sightseeing, there was a dinner-party given by the president of the Rome golf club. Knowing nothing of Italian I made my first speech in halting French. As we were going to bed, my host heard me making plans for the morrow. He quickly stopped that.

"You forget," he warned me, "I've entered you for the Italian championship."

I could not deny that it was in the bargain and I had to conceal my disappointment. Not to drag out the story, I may say that I won five rounds of that championship and found myself in the final, not having seen a single picture or statue in Rome and with one day left! The other finalist was an American and my host's greatest friend. I could no longer conceal my dismay and Harry Dearberg made a most agreeable proposition.

"It would do old Bill all the good in the world," he said, "to win this championship. He lives over here and you don't, and you are miserable about seeing nothing of Rome. I don't mind if you scratch to him."

I scratched to him with pleasure. It would have been

a great thing to have been champion of Italy, even in those days when the game was so little played, but it would have been sacrilege to have left Rome without a single hour's sightseeing. By the by, the name of the other finalist was Spalding, one of the family of the great sports equipment firm—a very agreeable and delightful companion and a sound golfer.

Whilst I am on the subject of golf, I remember that it was not many years after, that through the good offices of my friend Bernard Darwin, I was elected a member of the Woking golf club, to which I still belong. I have the most agreeable memories of a series of foursomes I played there with Mark Hambourg as my partner against his father-in-law, Lord Muir Mackenzie, and a friend of the latter's whose name I have forgotten. Mark was, and probably still is, one of the most magnificent examples of cheerful golfing incapacity ever seen on any links. Muir Mackenzie, although he understood the game, was not to be relied upon and our fourth was wildly erratic. For the first time in his life, Mark found himself winning matches. It was a new experience in which he gloried. He was always wanting to double the stakes and chaffed his father-in-law without ceasing. Brimful of humour, good-nature and spontaneous enjoyment, he kept the whole game in high spirits from beginning to end. His joy in winning a sovereign was equal to the respect with which he treated a cheque for a two-hundred-guinea recital. I have never played golf so strenuously or put forth such efforts as I did to win those matches. Afterwards, we would adjourn to the house I had taken in the neighbourhood and Mark would plant himself in the library and make his famous remark : "Here I am, here I rest."

Dinner of a sort, or supper—whichever we could offer—a bottle of wine, perhaps two, and a game of poker. That was all he wanted of life, and a more amusing guest never sat at anyone's table. He was a perfect example of

the club in which I first met him—the Savage Club. He played poker as I have never seen it played—joyously, recklessly but successfully. How many times we were all bluffed I often wondered, but whenever our curiosity exceeded our discretion, we seemed to pay for it.

It was a good many years later, but for fear it should slip from my memory I must relate here a somewhat curious incident in my life connected with the game of poker. A dear friend of mine, Mrs. Frankau (Frank Danby, the authoress of *The Heart of a Child*), on her death-bed begged me to take an interest in the Cleveland Bridge Club, which I had joined entirely for her sake. I kept my word and in due course became president of the club, a circumstance which was chiefly responsible for my renting, together with a friend, Gerald Duckworth, the upper portion of the premises as a *pied à terre* in London. At that time it was a moot point whether or no poker was a game of chance or skill, and the police were watching every club where the game was played. I myself played only bridge, as the poker stakes were too high for me, but to end the uncertainty I called upon General Horwood, the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard, and asked him if he would give me a decision on the question. The members of the club of which I was president wished to play the game. On the other hand, we did not wish to break the law. The Chief Commissioner, after taking some time for reflection, told me that he considered my visit a most improper proceeding and declined to give me any answer.

“Very well,” I said, “we will test the matter. I shall countenance the game being played tonight, and in fact invite the secretary to have a table prepared in the card-room.”

“You will do so at your own risk, Mr. Oppenheim,” was the stiff reply, and I was shown out.

That night the club was raided and the next morning the secretary and I stood in the dock at Bow Street,

arraigned for keeping a common gaming-house. We were found guilty and fined ten pounds. We paid the money and promptly appealed. I secured good counsel, although I forget their names, but I think that it was Lord Hailsham, then Sir Douglas Hogg, who cross-examined me. The latter looked at me with his usual benevolent smile as he twitched his gown and repeated my name.

"You are by profession an author, Mr. Oppenheim, I believe," he said. "No doubt," he added insinuatingly, "you find it convenient to supplement your income at times by playing poker at this Cleveland Club, wherever it may be!"

"I have never played poker there in my life, sir," was my reply.

Sir Douglas was dumbfounded. In reply to a further question, I explained that I was summoned as president of the club, and I had permitted the game to be played after notice to the Chief Commissioner in order to obtain a decision as to whether poker was an illegal game. A majority verdict was agreed upon and it was decided that poker was a game of skill and therefore legal, which decision, I believe, still stands. At any rate, my ten pounds were returned! There was a sequel, however, for as I was stepping into my taxi a man touched me on the shoulder.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Oppenheim," he said, "but I was the juryman who got in the way there. I don't know anything about cards, but I like your books and I like the way you stood up to the counsel, so I voted for you. If I hadn't, it would have been six all and the judge against you."

That night I was rung up by the secretaries of half a dozen of the principal clubs where cards were played in London, and was invited to at least a dozen dinners during the course of the next few weeks. I believe I am right in saying that since then poker has been regularly played and without interference from the police. In the end I

came in for a good deal of chaff, however, for one of the evening papers, very unkindly I thought, issued the following placard for its late edition :

CARD SCANDAL IN THE WEST END

WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR IN THE DOCK

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Man who lifted the Blind*

I WAS approaching my fortieth year when complete freedom came to me. I was able, without any qualms of conscience, to give up my directorship in the Leicester business and say goodbye altogether to commercial life. It had been hard work now and then, but I feel nothing but gratitude for the kindness of the many friends with whom I was associated during that strenuous portion of my life. I have always looked upon Julian Ullman, who, alas, died about this time, as my deliverer, but my association with my fellow directors—Messrs. Emil and Paul Steinfeld—was wonderfully friendly, and during bad times and good we never had the slightest disagreement. I was allowed to keep my shares in the firm when I left and I only parted with them recently at the request of the firm, who wished to make a family business of it. I am always happy to feel that it is still being conducted with success.

I was freed, too, about that time, to my deep regret, from family ties, as my mother, whose picturesque name, by the by, was Henrietta Susannah Temperley Budd, had not long survived my father.

My wife, who has always enjoyed the most perfect health of any woman I have ever known, was still my constant companion and our only child was being educated. I still had a house in Norfolk, and had acquired a taste for shooting, although I did not altogether forsake my golf.

I had entered in those days into what was almost a crusade against the menace of German militarism, as was evidenced in four or five of my novels published about this time—*The Mischief Maker*, *A Maker of History*, *The*

*Great Secret*, *The Illustrious Prince* and a few years later *The Double Traitor* and *The Great Impersonation*, the last-mentioned turning out to be the most successful novel I had yet produced.

I used my new sense of freedom by spending longer periods of time in London, where we took a small flat at the Savoy Court, better known to my readers, perhaps, as the "Milan" Court, and the table in the Grill Room, at which I have eaten more luncheons than I should care to count up and which was occupied by the imaginary Major Lyson in his three series of stories, was the third on the right against the wall. I met many interesting people and a few disappointing ones.

"You writers," a famous woman once said to me, "must have such interesting lives."

"Tell me why you think that?" I asked.

"Isn't it obvious? All the time you must be looking out for unusual types of character and travelling to unusual places."

"One of the greatest fallacies of life," I ventured to tell her.

We argued pleasantly for some time and I wrote a short article on the subject for a London evening paper before I went to bed that night. It has always seemed to me that, given a certain facility for writing and an aptitude for seeing life, the raw material for one's work is with one, wherever one may happen to be in the world. Fascinating stories have been and always will be written concerning the most ordinary people living in the most ordinary circumstances. Clerks, farmers and shopkeepers, factory hands, princesses and the sad-eyed women with broken lives—so long as they are human beings and retain the spirit of humanity, they are part of the turning wheel of life, material ready at any moment for the story-writer. I am a reader as well as a writer, and I have read more enthralling stories in which the scenes are laid in the next square, the quiet village, the busy streets, the market-

places of life, than in the more secret corners of the world. To quote only moderns, think of the warm glow of humanity with which Dickens' touch has gloried the great middle classes ! Think of what Pett Ridge has made of the Cockneys and Eden Phillpotts of the men and women of Devon and what glorious word pictures he has drawn of the country he worshipped ! If only H. G. Wells' brain had not made its urge so acutely compelling, what marvellous successors we might have had to Kipps ! I ask myself now, after the joyous labour of having produced a very large number of novels and short stories, how much I am indebted to this search for the unusual. Very little, I think. In my younger days I used to be fond of poking my nose into places where I did not belong, but I do not remember that I benefited greatly from it. Studies of criminal life by studying the criminal himself can only be half-hearted. Every one of us is at heart potentially a criminal. The accident of our remaining virtuous is the accident of circumstances. Given sufficient temptation of the sort which appealed, there are few of us who would resist the act of sin. It is the opportunity which counts. The habitual criminal is, in the majority of cases, the creature of circumstances. There may have been a kink in his character from birth, but unless it had been appealed to in auspicious circumstances at a propitious moment, it might never have developed and he might have been worshipping on the next footstool to our righteous selves today.

In the days when Prohibition was at its height in the United States, New York and Chicago were looked upon as being the crime centres of the world. An influential friend procured for me an introduction to the Chief Commissioner of Police Headquarters at New York and I was more or less initiated into the mysteries of American criminal life. I saw nothing I wanted to remember, much less write about. It was all very ugly and repulsive.

Haunts of the sexually vicious were more disgusting than inspiring. The few murderers to whom I was proudly introduced might have been met with at any tea-party. The only thrill I obtained, and that a slight one, was at the morning call-over at Police Headquarters, when the captured criminals of the day before were made to stand upon a raised platform and the detectives of the city, sometimes a hundred or more, all masked, looked them over to see if any were on their "wanted" lists. The Chief Commissioner probably summed the matter up cynically but succinctly that night at the dinner-table after he had listened to my impressions :

" Crime of the class you are looking for," he told me, " has moved up a peg or two the last few years. You are more likely to find it in Fifth Avenue than the Bowery —stockbrokers, lawyers, any quantity of them, society jays, the classes that have been hit most by the war. They are the crowd we have to keep an eye on nowadays. If you take my advice, you'll keep away from that crowd."

He was probably right.

The underworld of some of the European cities—Marselles, for instance—is more stimulating. There still exist, I believe, the original Seven Taverns which I have duly visited at various epochs in my life and which are supposed to be hotbeds of every sort of vice. Here I have seen crime quite naked enough, but not the sort of crime one would care to write about. I have seen beautiful women in plenty whom the police of the district point out as being responsible both by instigation and suggestion in their own persons for most of the desperate fights which are almost nightly occurrences. The French criminal is avaricious up to a point, but he is always lustful. He will fight more fiercely for the woman of his transient fancy than for the *mille* note of the unwary tourist.

Each one of these Taverns had, and probably still has,

a sort of Queen who boasts of the number of men who have fought, and even killed, for her favours. On the occasion of one of my earlier visits I spent a brief portion of the evening with one of these ladies listening to a succession of her adventures and wondering at the curious glances which were all the time directed towards our table. There was not one of her stories worth even an effort of the memory and I was thankful for the timely hint from the proprietor which enabled me to make my escape just before the court of her admirers arrived. She pretended to part with me with reluctance. I believe now that she had been only longing for the moment when she could be sitting in the window-seat clapping and encouraging her cavaliers in their nightly game of despoiling the adventurous stranger.

The only murder I actually witnessed in my life was outside this same place three nights later. I was walking down the steep descent from the crowded *boulevard*, with no intention of visiting the Tavern itself, in company with a friend who was a civilian official in the *Sûreté*—a man whom I had met during the war—when we heard the usual crashing of glasses and what sounded like two shots from inside the *café*. My friend dragged me into an alley. We were barely a dozen yards away and we saw a man, hatless and with his coat half torn off his back, come staggering out from the place, the blood streaming down his face. A moment later, the door was thrown open and I saw the woman to whom I had been talking a few nights before standing in a blaze of light with her arm round the neck of another man, who deliberately fired shot after shot into the crouching body of the fugitive. When his revolver was empty, he jerked it into the basin of the harbour on the other side of the way and calmly retreated into the Tavern. The girl was laughing—a horrible sound. I can see her now—her pallid face ghastly in the dazzling illumination. Rouge is not affected by the ladies of the Taverns. Her eyes were

brilliant, her mouth, wide open as she laughed, displaying her matchless teeth. Beautiful she was in her way, and yet terrifying. . . . My companion dragged me by the arm up the alley. I asked him whether we were not going to do anything. He thought I was mad.

"The *gendarme* at the corner of the street," he said, "has blown his whistle. As soon as there are half a dozen of them they will go down. Anyone who interfered from outside, or a single policeman, even, would get what he deserved."

It was an ugly experience—enough to cure one of that class of sightseeing for a time. I decided that night that I preferred the murders of my own imagination, and for years I left night wanderings at Marseilles alone.

In Paris I witnessed one odd little drama which made a great impression on me. I wrote the story of it for an English magazine—I forget its name—but the story was called *The Man Who Lifted the Blind*. During one of the visits of my earlier days to Paris I became an habitué of a night haunt of Montmartre which I have always thought one of the few which combined a certain spice of romance with the usual banalities of night life. It was run by Albert, who afterwards became famous and was the proprietor of a magnificent restaurant at the top of the hill where, for anything I know, he may still be officiating. It was called *Le Rat Mort* in those days, however, and for some reason or other became the fashionable rendezvous of wealthy English and Americans, also Parisians, who do not as a rule join in the night life of their city. On one of my visits I saw seated opposite to me, at a table alone, a girl obviously not of the same class as the usual frequenter. I noticed that Albert paid her particular attention and permitted no one to share her table. Now and then she produced a sketch-book and a pencil and worked for a few minutes. I was there three or four times a week and I suppose she got used to seeing me alone and decided that I was harmless. One evening she smiled and invited

me to a place by her side. I found that she was an American art student and I heard afterwards that she had made rapid progress in Paris and had already exhibited in the Salon. We took supper together and several times afterwards she allowed me to join her, always, however, insisting upon paying her share of the bill. I was curious as to the reason for her visits and one day she gratified my curiosity. She took me to her studio and showed me a startling picture of *Le Rat Mort* in the early morning. A man was holding up the blind which sheltered the great east window and the effect of the dawn upon the faces of the scattered crowd, the fading flowers, the disordered tables and tired waiters was marvellous. There was one curious thing. The man holding the blind had no head. The girl herself pointed to the omission.

"That is why I visit the café every night," she told me. "I want someone to come in to give me an inspiration for the face of the man who lifted the blind. As soon as I find him I shall say *au revoir* to Monsieur Albert. . . ."

A few nights afterwards the hoped-for event arrived. I entered to find her as usual alone, but she waved me away. Presently I saw the reason. Exactly opposite her was seated almost the best-looking man I have ever seen in my life, with fair to golden hair, perfect features, a very attractive *tout ensemble*. Then I saw her do what she had never done before—lean forward and beckon him to her table. When I rose to leave they were supping together. She touched my arm as I passed.

"I have found what I wanted," she whispered eagerly.

I could only congratulate her and pass on. At the door I saw Albert and his face wore an unusual look of trouble.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He indicated the table where the girl and the man were seated.

"Mademoiselle has been waiting for a type for her

picture," he groaned. "Face of a Christ in the garb of a man. You see what has happened?"

"Well?"

"Monsieur knows her companion?"

"Never saw him before."

"That is the Comte Michel de C——," he said. "There are many who come to my restaurant, I fear, with bad characters, but none so evil as he. I have tried to warn her but she will not listen."

I sighed.

"It is not our affair," I pointed out. "Mademoiselle seems well able to take care of herself."

"Others have thought so," he murmured sorrowfully.

I had to go back to London the next day but by chance I saw the end of the little drama. The night of my return to Paris I wound up as usual at *Le Rat Mort*. With a start of pleasure I observed that Mademoiselle was seated in her usual place. I walked up with the intention of accosting her but stopped short perhaps a yard or two away. It was the living ghost of Mademoiselle at which I gazed. She obviously saw in my face what I was feeling.

"You must not come here," she insisted. "I wish to be alone. I am still waiting."

I made some foolish rejoinder and chose a table a short distance away. Albert presently came to me. There was no need for questions between us.

"I warned her, Monsieur," he lamented. "I have daughters of my own. I warned her—but it was useless."

Barely half an hour later the climax came. The Comte de C—— appeared with some companions. He bowed half-mockingly to the girl as he passed. She looked at him with stony face but there was something terrible in her eyes. An hour must have passed. She did not move. She drank one or two glasses of wine and smoked furiously. Then the Comte, who had apparently been telling his companions the story of his adventure, rose laughingly to his feet.

"I'll show you," he said, and moved towards the curtain.

He stood there deliberately and drew up the blind. Some portion of the effect of the early sunrise followed his movement. He turned to face the room and for a moment his expression was the expression which she had sought—almost Christlike but stern. Then, even as he stood with his finger on the spring, he laughed—a drunken, Satyr-like laugh—at his friends across the way. One saw the evil line of his mouth. I was the first to realise what was about to happen and I sprang to my feet. I think that my cry probably saved the man's life. The girl was standing up in her place. Almost as that first shot sounded, Albert, who had been watching, flashed down the room. She hesitated. In a second she would be in his grasp. She had time for one shot. She turned the pistol upon herself. The second bullet did its work.

When I look back on the period of which I have been writing I realise that the night life, as a show market, anyhow, of Europe and Asia, with its undercurrents of crime and all manner of intrigues, has almost ceased to exist. In London it never flourished. We English have a touch of the hypocrite in our blood and whilst we throw ourselves madly into any diversion we can find in foreign countries, we preserve our respectability at home. The natural joyousness of the pleasure-seeking Frenchman seems never to have recovered since the war of 1914–18. Montmartre is dead. At the few other places that remain there is a tired, almost jaded spirit about the merrymaking. On the Riviera there is still spasmodic gaiety, but, after all, the Riviera is only a picnic ground for holiday-makers. Gaiety is its business—not vice.

Berlin has its flashes of insanity but Hitler's hand is tightening and the night clubs are losing their hold on the reveller.

Further east, night life, as we understand it, has never

flourished, not in the last two thousand years at any rate. The Oriental takes too good care of his women and without women there can be no gaiety. At Saigon I have frivelled till the early hours of the morning, but it was all very correct—one might almost say stupid. One was tempted almost to regret the absence of those figures of the past, suggestive and evil though they were. No race in the world is more careful of its womenkind than the Chinese, and the facile love-making and temperate habits of the Japanese have always been fatal to that spirit of adventure—criminal, amorous or merely gay—which has filled the *morgue* and emptied the pockets of the Western philanderer. The plain fact of the matter is that the Great War has changed all that. The night life of the great cities of Europe—Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Rome—was more stimulating when beautiful and intriguing sirens whispered during the dance of secret houses where a fortune was to be made by easy gambling, or tried to excite curiosity concerning some mysterious personage behind the curtain, a personage of great power who was willing to purchase secrets, political, military or naval, of any country at fabulous prices. That has happened in actual life as well as in fiction. It may again, but I think not. Even diplomacy is becoming mechanised.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Fred Thomson ate the Bacon, but Calthrop found the Countess*

I WAS in my forty-eighth year when the war of 1914 was declared, and I must admit that when I, in common with the rest of the world, had shaken off the first horrified sense of confusion as to all that it entailed, there was, in my own particular case, a certain feeling of grim exultation. It was the genuine, almost childish "I told you so!" spasm of self-satisfaction.

I had written seven or eight novels and countless articles predicting the calamity which had come to pass.

I had been a humble follower of Lord Roberts on various platforms and in the Press.

I had learnt something of the psychology of the ruling classes in Germany during my various visits there and I knew what they were out for.

It is rather a horrible confession to make, but, during its earlier stages, I benefited materially, to some considerable extent, by the fulfilment of my prophecies. People, especially in America, who had looked upon me as a man with a bee in his bonnet or a deliberate scare-monger, demanded new editions of some of my stories, such as *The Mischief Maker*, *A Maker of History*, *The Double Traitor* and, later on, *The Great Impersonation*. The public, in those early days, devoured fiction, and though, in the grim times which were to come, we all suffered financially and every other way, I sometimes reflect, with a certain amount of shame, how little direct sacrifice I was called upon to endure.

There were humiliations, of course, and disappointments. There was no idea, at the commencement of

hostilities, that the man approaching the age of fifty could be of any real use, and the curt way in which I was rejected for any form of active service on my first examination was wounding alike to my self-confidence and my *amour propre*. In fact, now I come to think over those days, it seems to me that I met with nothing but continual failure, in spite of my honest efforts to find a post where I could be of some utility.

The first job which I nearly succeeded in obtaining was in connection with an unnamed branch of one of the Services and one which I pleaded I ought to know something about after having written nearly a dozen spy stories. My repeated calls and letters at last were taken notice of and I was summoned to appear before Admiral Fred Browning in his office at Whitehall—Freddy Browning of the Garrick ! I really felt that my chance had arrived, for I saw a good deal of Browning in those days and I believed, as I am sure was the case, that he was kindly disposed. I endured an hour's questioning and cross-examination with apparent success. My fluent but somewhat indifferent French was rather in my favour, for too correct an accent would have been a hindrance, but, alas, when I was asked to go ahead in German my heart sank. I made a bluff at a few sentences but the Admiral soon cut me short. I think he was quite as disappointed as I was.

"I took it for granted, with your name, that you could speak the language, or I should not have taken up so much of your time," he said. "What I wanted from you was just your type of indifferent French, but sound German."

"I could study twelve hours a day—" I began.

"Not a hope," was the somewhat curt answer.

Out I went, with all my prospects of a busy, exciting life full of possibilities dashed to the ground. It was not even much satisfaction to me when I heard, some two months afterwards, that the man who succeeded in obtaining the post, for which there were many applicants,

crossed the German frontier from Switzerland on a somewhat delicate mission only once and never returned.

I must confess that my name was rather a curse to me in those days. I got so tired of explaining my undoubted English ancestry that later on I carried about with me my own birth certificate, my father's birth certificate and my grandfather's birth certificate—mine dating from London and the other two from the old-world town of Faringdon in Berkshire. Even then, I was accused by a Devonian farmer of signalling to a non-existent German submarine from the windows of a house in which my wife was living in Devonshire. He was a dogged old fellow, too.

"How do you know that he is an alien?" he was asked.

"With a name like his'n," he told the sergeant at the police station, "of course he be German."

Even people of intelligence in France, more than in England, were unpleasantly affected by my unfortunate surname. Two posts I might have occupied were denied to me because French people with whom I would have had to associate refused to accept me as a *bona fide* Englishman.

"I cannot bear these naturalised Huns," one Frenchman, in a really high official position, declared behind my back and barely out of my hearing.

"A naturalised Hun," with three generations of English-born ancestors behind him!

The most sickening job I ever undertook, after my failure with Admiral Browning, was speech-making and canvassing, trying to induce others to enlist in the army or navy. One felt that here was a job which should have been left to wounded soldiers or sailors who had done their bit and could speak with conviction. *Anno domini* tells, of course, but for a well-fed and obviously healthy man of fifty to preach to his fellows, perhaps only fifteen or twenty years younger than himself, that it was their duty to risk their lives for their country, he himself pro-

posing to sit at home and read all about it in the newspapers, was a thankless task. I soon gave it up. I could not find the right words nor strike the right note, and when I endeavoured to explain how hard I had tried to break down the disabilities of the years I always felt that I was not convincing. To me, those few months spent in this fashion were the most dismal portions of that dreary epoch.

I made one brief visit to the front during the second year of the war. Mr. Blumenfeld, the editor of the *Daily Express* in those days, gave me a roving Press commission for a fortnight. I am afraid I only proved what I knew fairly well beforehand. Journalism is not a profession you can tumble into and I never acquired the pithy, illuminative style which is necessary to depict events when space is limited. Very little of the material I sent in was used. I was given another trial, as I happened to be in a second line of trenches when reserves were telephoned for, and I wrote a few rushed lines which I think fairly described the spirit of the men. In a month's time, however, I was back in England engaged on the same apparently hopeless task. The only memories I brought back with me were a confused sense of deafness, through the continual thunder of the guns and a pleasant recollection of a dinner-party at the English Press Headquarters, where I sat next Sir Philip Gibbs. Years later, we lingered until five o'clock one afternoon over a luncheon at my small villa on the Riviera—Philip Gibbs and his wife and son—gossiping about those days.

I settled down at last, chiefly through the good offices of G. H. Mair, that very brilliant Irishman, who was at the time Chief of the Ministry of Information. I had a room and a private secretary allotted to me in Norfolk Street and I wrote an enormous quantity of propaganda of every sort, some of which I believe was translated into every language in the world. But it is one of the most

miserable tasks imaginable to write about a war in terms of eloquence for other people's edification from a snug office in the heart of London with your club barely half a mile off, your luncheon and dinner hours yours to choose. I remember saying to Mair one day, when he remarked upon my apparent discontent, that no man ought to write about the war without a sword in his left hand and the ache of a wound in his body. One's set phrases were sickening and one's little spasms of eloquence artificial and unconvincing. There were good fellows at work, too, under that roof; Arnold Bennett on the other side of the hall, Hamborough on the next storey. Hall Caine, with a portfolio of war films under his arm, was a constant visitor, and Temple Thurston, whom I succeeded, often appeared.

Things brightened up for me at last. One day Mair came into my room with a wounded officer, Captain Kapp, the caricaturist. I was invited to join with the latter in running the château out in France which was kept for neutral journalists. We, Kapp and I, were to change positions from England to France periodically. I believe that I was as near feeling tears in my eyes at that moment as at any time in my life. I realised that Mair had been working to get me a job of this sort, knowing how anxious I was to get something permanent abroad and how I loathed the stuff I was writing. Mair was one of the best-natured and kindest-hearted men I have ever met. I was almost a stranger to him when the war commenced but I never found anyone more sympathetic or with a more generous disposition.

My new work included a very slight occasional liaison with a certain department of the War Office, and I found it full of interest. The accredited journalists from foreign countries, with the exception of the Americans, who even before they came into the war had their own establishment, found their way in due course to Norfolk Street, were interviewed by Mair or myself and spent a week,

sometimes longer, in London whilst I made reports about them to certain home authorities and to Kapp in France, or vice versa.

At the end of what was really a period of probation, it was our custom to board the 8 A.M. staff train at Victoria and, after our journey across the Channel, be whisked off from the French port at which we arrived to a partially destroyed château in a neighbourhood about which we preserved rather an absurd amount of secrecy. Our quarters were bare and meagrely furnished ; we had very few comforts and were only moderately fed, but there was the thunder and horror of the guns never out of our ears by day or night and the feeling that at last we were in real touch with the horrible business. Day by day, in the roughest and sometimes the most ancient of cars, we tore about the country in charge of a staff officer with a pile of maps in front of him, always subject to unexpected telephone messages ordering us back home again when we stopped at any of the military centres. Life was an incessant battle between either Kapp or myself, whichever happened to be in charge, and the journalists. They were all the time wanting to get a little nearer the front, and our instructions were to keep them as far behind as possible. One day, I remember, there was a mutiny. We found no staff officer when we sallied out at six o'clock, but a despatch for me instructing me to take my correspondents to some field hospitals well behind the lines, to pick up lunch there if possible and to go on to a huge training-camp not far from Le Touquet where officers and men alike were being instructed in the use of a new field gun. My little company of correspondents hated it all. They had their own little schemes. They pointed out eagerly to me that they wanted to know what was happening here, and there, and somewhere else. I had information that things were going very badly in all those places, but I had to explain to them, with a great show of reasonableness, that, whilst we were giving them every facility for

seeing what could be seen of the fighting, it was just as necessary, from our point of view, that they should be in possession of facts about our huge resources behind the lines and the great training work which was going on. It was one of those days when it was hard to keep cheerful. Sometimes we had to pause to allow the passage towards the rear of very battered fragments of broken batteries, at others to let through reinforcements being hurried on to the front. Once or twice we ourselves were held up by a great fleet of motor ambulances, the fever of war in the eyes of the tired drivers, tell-tale splashes upon the wheels and windows, in some cases the blinds closely drawn. It was very bad stage management. The shock of defeat was written in the eyes of so many of those drawn-faced, stumbling youths. It was like poison to those who were being hurried up to the line to take their places.

Those were ugly days. There was one great triumph which is one of my most poignant recollections. It happened to be my turn out just at the time the Canadians were making their big assault, and we were the first civilians—I and my little troop of journalists—to scramble in their wake up the Vimy Ridge, which had passed into our hands only twenty-four hours before. I don't know how we got permission for our movements on that occasion. The orders were clear enough and we followed them out to the letter, but I have always believed there was a mistake somewhere. If not, I think it must have been because one of my company was the editor of an important Scandinavian paper and we were doing our best to impress. We certainly showed him a little of the grim aftermath of war that day. There were burying parties every few hundred yards dotted all over the hillside; on our left hand, about a mile in the rear, a French village was being pounded to pieces by guns and nearby all the barns and houses that were left were in flames. It was very seldom, however, during my experience, that we

were able to offer our journalistic *pensionnaires* such a living picture. There were war trophies for them in plenty that day. Every one of them returned to the château with at least one helmet and two or three battered flasks and oddments of every description.

The only other occasion on which I was able to give my little company of journalists a really fine bird's-eye view of the war was when we found included on the itinerary handed over in the morning a brief visit to the famous Hill 60. The ascent, so far as we were allowed to go, left with one the impression of a pantomime world of fantastic undergrowth and trees from which most of the bark had been stripped. A grim and deadly sight, with sudden empty spaces through which one was able to get flashing views of the sun-smitten landscape below, partially obscured in places with mist and rolling fragments of cloud. It was a drear memory, and one of the quaintest things about it, which has always lived in my thoughts, was the coming upon a French artist, of course with special permission, hard at work before his easel about a quarter of the way up. He asked for a drink, which we gave him from one of our flasks, after which he waved us on without even looking up. I have often wondered what became of the picture.

Memories of the war are grim things in which to indulge. One in particular, not, however, a pleasant one, has haunted me more than once since. It became the custom of the outgoing sponsor, that is to say, either Kapp or myself, to entertain the handful of men he was taking out, to a dinner somewhere the night before their departure. On one particular occasion I had a hint that a special dinner would be rather in order as one of our number was a writer of some distinction—a professor, I believe, at a certain university. I remember two or three whom I invited to the dinner, but, alas, the majority of them seem to have passed on. Alfred Sutro was one,

always a delightful conversationalist with a wonderful fund of spirits, although his outlook upon life was sometimes, like his plays, a little cynical. It was some time after the production of *The Walls of Jericho*, I remember, and he was getting a little impatient with the newer school of dramatists. A Freddie Lonsdale play, for instance, came in that night for a few scathing words of criticism. Then there was a man of whom I saw a great deal in those days and who rejoiced in the picturesque name of Alexander Teixeira de Mattos. His greatest achievement in the world of literature was his delightful translations of Maurice Maeterlinck, but he also wrote on his own account little essays full of sparkling humour. He was a worshipper of Walter Pater, although he made no attempt to imitate his style. As he put it himself, he stood with his ears attuned to music and his hat in his hand when he read any of that priceless prose, but his own efforts lay in less ambitious directions. E. V. Lucas was there too, fascinated by our principal guests, deliberate in diction and notable for his owl-like gravity of demeanour. There were two others, but for the moment I cannot remember who they were. Anyhow, it was one of the pleasantest dinners over which I have ever presided. Wine, food and conversation were all on par, yet the strangest thing about it was its termination. We were all shaking hands, when a perfect stranger to me crossed the room from one of the side tables kept for visitors and whispered in the professor's ear. The latter waved his hand to all of us and followed the newcomer from the room. "E. V.," Gerald Duckworth, who was also there, and I sat down and drank another bottle of '70 port while we sang our vanished visitor's praises.

The sequel came next morning at the station. I had all my little party ensconced in the staff train and was in the act of looking for my own seat when I noticed the professor was not with us. At the same time, I was

touched on the shoulder by a red-tabbed young officer from a department in Whitehall. He handed me a note. I tore it open with a terrible foreboding. Its contents were brief enough, but hideously eloquent : " Professor — will not be travelling."

My last leave at home before the Armistice was a humorous affair, although at the time it seemed almost like a tragedy. I arrived in London late at night, made a clean man of myself and went into the Garrick Club, where I met a few friends and we settled down to dine. Perhaps we were all a little gay, perhaps after many months of depression we let ourselves go more than was wise, but anyhow, Gerald Duckworth asked me how I was going to spend what would probably be my last leave. I replied at once, "I am off to Devonshire tomorrow. We have taken a house there for the duration of the war." There was a little groan of envy. Gerald Duckworth, in particular, who had rather a hard job of censoring, frankly declared that he hated me. E. V. was also gently sarcastic. Dion Calthrop, who was of the number, banged the table with his fist.

"Suits me down to the ground," he declared. "I am writing a play with a man down at Seaton. I will come and spend a few days with you first."

"Delighted to have all of you," I agreed. "We have scarcely any servants and you will find the service rough enough I am sure, but there are plenty of rooms and my wife and daughter are both there."

"How do we go ?" E. V. demanded.

"I have an old Studebaker across in the University Garages at the back of Clarges Street. I drive myself and when the thing doesn't go, you fellows can take it in turns to push."

I despatched a telegram to my wife, which she received two days later, and at nine o'clock the following morning we started gaily out. The weather was still hot and with

every breath of country air my guests became more contented with their lot. The old Studebaker never even missed fire, and although we made one quarter of an hour's stop for a very acceptable gin and bitters, we reached Salisbury in plenty of time for lunch and in the best possible spirits. It was only when we were approaching Wells that a careless remark from one of my guests started the trouble.

" You fellows have brought your ration cards, of course ? " I asked, turning round.

" Ration cards ? " E. V. repeated vaguely. " I had one, I know, but my wife took it directly it was issued."

" Great Scott ! " I exclaimed. " Where is yours, Dion ? "

" My wife did the same with mine," Calthrop admitted frankly.

Dion, by the by, was a fine, healthy-looking picture of a man, six feet high.

" And you, Gerald ? " I asked.

" Evelyn has mine," he replied, referring to his and my housekeeper at our flat in Clarges Street. " She makes use of it, I suppose, but I always get anything I order at the club."

" What are you looking so scared about, Opp ? " E. V. demanded.

" Oh, nothing at all," I replied. " Only just this. When I was home last, I only stayed for two days, but there was scarcely a scrap of anything to eat in the place and my wife has told me since that she can get nothing. Not even her ration. Devonshire, which sounds the richest, is really the poorest county for food in England. By Jove, you chaps are going to be hungry ! "

" You're kidding, Opp ! " E. V. scoffed.

" I swear I'm not," I replied.

We stopped for some tea. The contempt with which our order for cream was received and the paltry little pat of butter we were offered augured ill for us. If one of

us had been a pukka soldier in uniform we might have had a chance of getting round the trouble, but when I tried to buy a tongue in a grocer's shop the man was almost rude to me.

"There is just one thing," I said, as we climbed back into the car, "whatever we may lack in food, we have plenty to drink. An unopened case of whisky, the same of champagne and some light dry Sauterne I get sent over from France."

"Whisky and soda is a pleasant drink," Dion Calthrop murmured pensively.

"Champagne is pleasanter," E. V. declared. "I hate to mention the word port, Opp."

"Port is not good unless you have had lots of good food," I replied, "but, as a matter of fact, I knew you owed us a visit a little later on and I found that the landlord of an hotel in Lynton had four dozen 1900 vintage."

"Do we have to go all the way to Lynton for a glass of port?" Gerald demanded.

"We do not. I made a bargain with the landlord. I spent an afternoon in his cellar, uncorked and carefully rebottled every bottle he had and took it back to Martinhoe. It's been lying for two months undisturbed. You may suffer pangs of hunger, but you're spared dying of thirst. I have a wonderful walnut tree."

The idea of walnuts and old port seemed to cheer them up. We crossed the wonderful moor in fine spirits and descended the most dangerous hill in perfect safety.

Half-way down we pulled up and gave a lift to a neighbour, the Countess of C——. In the slight readjustment of places I heard Calthrop whisper to Duckworth :

"I'll never laugh at Opp's mysterious countesses again. Why, he finds them even striding through the bracken on Exmoor."

My wife and daughter came out on the paved balcony to gaze at these unexpected visitors. Gerald Duckworth made a cup of his hands.

"Is there anything for dinner?" he shouted.

"Did you get my telegram?" I called out.

"Not a line," my wife answered. "Telegrams aren't delivered here except on Saturdays, anyhow."

Then I suddenly recognised Joe Burgess standing on the corner of the avenue. He was the boatman, but was always engaged for the summer months.

"What's in your basket, Joe?" I called out.

He held them up one by one—shining, gleaming whiting, mackerel and codling, all still alive; also two huge lobsters were legging it down the avenue, but with the master's eye upon them.

E. V. stood with my wife's hands in his.

"I believe," my daughter told him, "you were more pleased to see the fish than us!"

"We were so afraid," Calthrop explained, "that your husband's too great hospitality might cause you embarrassment. We see now that all is well."

There was plenty of ice, fortunately, and soon I was listening to one of the most cheerful sounds in the world. My wife chose that moment to make a suggestion for which she was very nearly hugged all round.

"After all, Phillips," she reminded me, "you have all the shooting over two moors. There are at least five thousand acres. Couldn't you break the law a little about the pheasants? I know where there are some odd ones and there are several coveys of partridges quite close to the house. As for the hares, they are a positive nuisance in the kitchen gardens."

There was a strange silence. E. V. wiped his eyes. Gerald Duckworth indulged in that cherubic smile which always transfigured him. I caught sight of my gun-cases in the hall and gave a whoop. What did ration cares matter to us!

We spent a delightful few days. The partridges lay close and were wonderfully tame. As to the pheasants,

we had no scruple in breaking the law with impunity. Then a speck of trouble appeared. Fred Thomson, who was very keen about a play we were writing together—*Eclipse* it was called and it had a fair run afterwards at the Garrick Theatre—turned up unexpectedly with an urgent message from C. B. Cochran demanding that we make some alterations. There was no trouble about a room for him, but my wife's first question was the inevitable one of the housekeeper :

“Have you brought your ration card ?”

Of course he had done nothing of the sort, but we had got on so well that we treated the matter lightly. The trouble began, however, the next morning. Those were days when we were all breakfast-eaters—bacon and eggs—the latter of which we had a plentiful supply—bacon and grilled pheasants' legs. Bacon was required in every sort of way. Unfortunately, on this particular morning, Fred Thomson was the first person down. He made the usual visit to the sideboard, and when we arrived he looked up from his plate cheerfully.

“I'm afraid you fellows will have to send for some more bacon,” he remarked. “There were only two slices, anyway.”

“Here goes one of them, at any rate,” Gerald Duckworth observed, helping himself from the other's plate.

“That's today's ration,” I told Fred severely.

He was very apologetic, but we none of us quite forgave him. His last words when his visit came to an end were :

“I'll send you down a whole side of Wiltshire, even if I have to give up my coupons for a month !”

We bade him god-speed cheerfully but nothing happened about that bacon ! The next time I saw him was for a moment on the pavement outside a theatre on Broadway, New York. We made an appointment to meet later but neither of us was able to turn up. I hear that he is doing wonderfully well in the States, and if ever this little

reminder should reach him, he will know what to do about it. A Stilton cheese would be equally acceptable !

I missed Armistice Day at the front. It was Kapp's choice and naturally he decided to stay in France. He and his little company of journalists were, I believe, the first to enter the town of Lille, from the northern suburbs of which masses of Germans were still in retreat. My fate was to join in the fury of hysterical enthusiasm which made London that night and the following morning an unforgettable memory. We yelled ourselves hoarse in front of Buckingham Palace, drove round the town, six or seven of us, on the roofs of taxis, went to every place where we were likely to meet friends, ordered countless drinks and fortunately forgot to drink a good many of them. I recall a hectic time at the Ministry of Information. The final message was slow in coming through, and as everyone who could had rushed over to France, I was in charge. Everyone was demanding that we should close the place and sally out into the streets. I felt it was my responsibility to keep going until the last message arrived. For three-quarters of an hour I was hustled, bombarded with half good-humoured abuse and had the clothes nearly torn off my back. A dozen hands thrust the telephone receiver against my ear when at last the eagerly expected call came on the private telephone : "Official. The Armistice is signed." That was the exact phraseology of the historic message. If it did not save my life, it saved me from further indignities.

A wild morning ! I made my way to St. Dunstan's, where my daughter, Geraldine, was holding an important post and added her to the party which was rapidly growing in size. There were three of us from the Ministry, one a young Canadian officer whose name, I believe, was Light. We picked up Gerald Duckworth in Covent Garden and it seemed to me that we were all the time adding to our number. I had been fortunate enough to find a taxi and

we drove to Buckingham Palace. We saw the return, several times repeated, of the King and Queen to receive the applause and shouts of the multitude. We forced our way into the Savoy for lunch and again later on into Romano's Gallery for dinner. Here we were comfortable, we had air, a little space and the most amazing thing in the way of a Lord Mayor's Show anyone could conceive. In the streets below, climbing the lamp-posts, scrambling over the tops of stationary buses and automobiles, was a vast crowd. A wild night indeed ! Pent-up masses of energy expended by shouting, making any sort of noise, dancing like madmen. There was very little drunkenness. I remember lying awake for an hour in the early daylight, after we had struggled back to our various abodes, trying to visualise what had happened. Freedom again, a life without being compressed and cramped by outside demands. The open field again for the writer. It was only when one settled down seriously in the days to follow and tried to breathe once more something of the old atmosphere, that one realised how terribly difficult it was going to be to drive all those torturing memories into the background, to write joyously of love and adventure in a world which for years to come was to be begirt with a dreary aftermath of horrors, a world which could never again be the same theatre for the novelist or canvas for the painter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Post-war Nerve Cramp*

DURING the long progress of the war, I can imagine no nation capable of facing with greater fortitude or in more dignified fashion than Great Britain that long series of disappointments and disasters, the shadow of which penetrated into almost every home. Even in the darkest moments there was never any shrinking, not even a whispered suggestion of possible defeat. Our people stood the test finely.

Yet I think the historian of the future might well be a little severe upon us for the lethargy, the numbness of thought and a certain paralysis of action natural enough in the earlier stages of the struggle, but too long-continued during its dreary aftermath. The nerves of the nation appeared to have been too sorely tried and the reaction produced a melancholy, not perhaps so deeply rooted as the profound despair which seemed to brood over Northern France, but nevertheless an ugly and a formidable influence having a cramping effect upon all imaginative work. Personally, I know that I felt it at the time and have realised it more and more every year since.

It is only when one tries, as I am doing now, to put into some sort of shape and order the jigsaw-like history of one's past life, that one realises what a dreary gap was made in its framework by those sad years. This is the period about which I remember least. I took a house at Woking in Surrey for a time, then I went back to Norfolk. But it was difficult to get over the sadness of finding so many old friends gone. I had been captain of the golf

club in the year before the war. Now I wandered about the place sometimes without seeing a soul I knew to talk to. I had owned some shooting, which I put in order again without any real enthusiasm, for out of the small but cheerful company who had so often been my guests at least half had disappeared.

We, my wife and I, travelled abroad for a time, visited some of our favourite spots, tried to recover the inspired wonder of our first acquaintance with the marvellous Madonnas of the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace in Florence, and wound up in the South of France. There, for the first time, I think, some of the old spirit returned. In that cosmopolitan refuge of the pleasure-seeker, or the worker anxious to throw aside the manacles of too rigid an existence, I lived, with the exception of one cruise and a visit to the United States, for some twelve years.

I must say a word or two about that cruise, in passing, for it was one of the most pleasurable experiences of our lives. We sailed in the *Vectis*, a famous yacht transformed into a cruising boat, and found on board an old friend, Colonel Forbes Eden, a former neighbour in Norfolk, also a relation of Guy Eden, the journalist who has since done some wonderful work for a well-known newspaper. Harry Eden himself was one of the wittiest and most delightful companions I have ever known, and to have him at our table was a constant joy. Unfortunately, he was a man of means and too much of a dilettante in spirit to have taken up a profession seriously, or I am sure he would have made a name for himself. Other people on board were the late Dowager Countess of Kimberley, a well-read and charming woman of the world, and her brilliant daughter, Lady Isobel Wodehouse, whom it was a delight to come across not long ago dancing one night with Sir John Squire at the Ritz. Both Lady Isobel and her mother were women of exceptional culture, with whom conversation was always a pleasure, and they possessed one

gift very rare nowadays—they had very beautiful and very musical voices which one never forgot. It was on this cruise that we paid our first visit to Egypt and met Robert Hichens at Luxor, where we had a glimpse of his villa and enjoyed a few hours of his delightful hospitality. Egypt is such a well-trodden tourist land now that one's impressions are best kept to oneself, especially when one did only the ordinary things. But I had one day of unique entertainment, entered into by reason of the insistence of my dragoman, who had come across an old number of an English illustrated paper in which I was one of a small shooting party. He insisted upon my committing such an act of sacrilege as going to shoot quail in the shadow of the Pyramids with a borrowed gun and forty beaters who came by tram across from Cairo. We started off in the blazing sunshine. My costume consisted of a topi, a singlet, a pair of linen shorts and rather thick shoes made of dry white leather. We walked the quail up in rice-fields. They were far too fat to fly, and if one waited till they got more than six feet off the ground the whole chorus of beaters rose in a deafening shout urging me to action. The moment I had, with some reluctance, slain one of these birds, there was a rush on the part of the beaters, who flung themselves in a scrambling heap upon it, and the one who brought me its tattered remains sang to me for *baksheesh*. It was amusing for an hour or two, but when my bag was a few short of a hundred and the beaters refused to carry any more, I had had quite enough myself and went back to where our charioteer was waiting. My wife's derision was only what I had expected, but all the same I was the most popular man on the boat that night, for anything more delicious than those quail—although I prefer to say as little as possible about the shooting of them—I never tasted.

A happy time and certainly a stimulating environment we found when we returned to the Riviera. The pictorial,

the picturesque and the more gracious side of day-by-day life seemed crowded here on to one small canvas, changing month by month and year by year with inconceivable rapidity.

At about this time I received a commission from Methuen to write a short volume entitled *The Quest for Winter Sunshine*. It was perhaps an unfortunate coincidence that while I was still considering the matter of where to begin, I received the offer of a friendly charter of a small motor yacht from my friend Tottie Harwood, of whom I shall have more to say later. We decided instantly upon a voyage to Corsica and we set out gaily within a few days, having, I am thankful to say, laid in ample stores, solid and liquid. The passengers consisted of myself, my wife and daughter, my secretary in those days, Miss Bigge, an excellent captain, a steward who had had a thoroughly good training from Harwood as to the making of cocktails, and a crew of two who were not above accepting any amateur assistance in rough weather. We had plenty of it but we got across pretty creditably on the whole. I myself have never known the meaning of sea-sickness and my wife and daughter held up very well, considering that we had one very bad day. My secretary was not feeling equal to much in the way of work, nor did I ask it of her. The utterly new experience of being the master for a time of a boat, even a small one, was quite enough to keep me happy and my thoughts employed. The weather crossing the Mediterranean was variable, but not absolutely what we had hoped to find. We arrived in the harbour of Ajaccio very early one morning in a drizzling rain. We prepared for a few days' visit, lowered and put in order the dinghy and waited for the clouds to break. They didn't !

I have heard of people visiting Corsica in search of sunshine and finding it. They have the advantage of me. I stayed there several days and the rain never ceased. The country behind Ajaccio, through which my people

motored during the brief intervals of moderate weather which were vouchsafed to us, seemed to be beautiful in a rocky and picturesque fashion, reminiscent, naturally enough, of a more prolific and richer-soiled Sicily. The vineyards are rough, the cattle thin, and the peasants, in their unusually sombre attire, lack the frank graciousness of manner and speech to which one becomes accustomed in Sicily. However, although my report of its climate was bound to be disheartening, I remember the place with some affection because during our stay of eight or ten days in the harbour I was afflicted with the sudden urge for work and managed to complete, before we left, the first draft of an entire novel, besides commencing the sketch of a film play.

I landed our last morning to have a farewell shave and hair-cut and confided to the barber my rather unhappy experiences.

"You," he remarked, "are not like the last author who visited here. He came not intending to write at all, but he was so delighted with the place that he completed a whole story before he left. He meant only to stay a week but he stayed a month and he wrote about nothing but Corsica."

Afterwards I discovered that this more fortunate person was Joseph Conrad.

So back from our moist but pleasant excursion across the seas to Cagnes. My charter of the boat was up and Tottie Harwood himself was back amongst us—large, genial, expansive, with a perpetual smile and never an ill word to say of anyone. Frynn Tennyson Jesse, his wife, was with him, and we brought back with us, as it chanced, her long-lost cousin, Alfred Tennyson, whom she had never actually met but always thought of, for she too was of that mighty, moody, sometimes depressed, sometimes exuberant, clan of poets and sportsmen. Alfred Tennyson has been my friend for many years and

I still love him. I first came across him in the pit bunker going for the second hole at Sheringham, where he impressed me, as a young man, with his beautiful swing, almost perfect stance and a golf vocabulary which was a credit to anyone of his age. I have played a great deal of golf with him. I remember one famous occasion on which Arnold Read and I won the Sheringham foursomes from him and his brother Charles, on the seventeenth green by means of a twenty-five yard putt on my part. His nonchalance might have been a trifle assumed, but it was a perfect effort.

“Very, very nearly a good putt, Opp,” he said. “The little mole-hole on the left helped you, or it would have been a perfect one.”

The cups still stand upon my sideboard wherever may be my home and we have drunk all varieties of wine out of them. Alfred was out here staying with me at my present abode—the Domaine de Notre Dame—only last year but he is too good for me at golf these days, although he doesn’t play quite the same game himself. The difference between our ages is about thirteen or fourteen years but he has kept his figure a little more completely than I have and I have had to shorten my swing, which he has never done. He plays at a four handicap instead of a plus-two, which, I think, was his high peak at Sheringham, but it is still a crisp, beautiful game. I hope to see more of him if the world swings well during the next few years, as his delightful wife has been left a house and some property at Hyères, and Hyères is a place I am very fond of. It possesses two rare gifts for the French Riviera. There is a genuine golden warmth in its sunshine which is sometimes lacking elsewhere, and it has more wild flowers than any place I have ever visited, except the slopes of some of the lower mountains of Switzerland. I have never seen violets grow in such profusion as they did years ago in Hyères. Now, alas, all that has changed. Even during the 1914 war, the great stretches of violet

farms with blossoms almost as large as orchids were ploughed up and the ground sown at the peasants' will.

There came during this period of my somewhat aimless wandering about the Riviera a day of intense autumnal heat—towards the end of September, I think it was—a day full of sweet odours, when I flung myself at full length upon the yellow sands, with the blue Mediterranean lapping idly at my feet, leaned back against the trunk of a pine tree, drew in one long breath of that sweet fragrance and swore that I had found my El Dorado, and that where I was I would live and die. Then I slept—slept, mind you, not dozed—with that perfume lingering in my senses and the swishing music of the sea in my ears. When I awoke, the inspiration was still with me. I made a pilgrimage to the pine-grown slopes behind, accompanied by a voluble but persuasive land agent, and I considered plots of land. It was the old story all over again. Plots with sea frontage would have needed the gold of a fairy prince ; plots on the near and sheltered part of the hillside were sold. There they were, all staked out like lots in a cemetery, and not even my eloquent friend was able to persuade me that the land which remained was really the best of all. There are many pleasant little spots between Hyères and Beauvallon, but Beauvallon will always remain one of the most charming corners of the western Riviera. Sunshine and sea, pine woods and the sheltering mountains, with a view of the ancient town of St. Tropez over the bay ! What could man want more ? And yet, when one closed one's eyes and fancied villas built on all those marked-out spaces, one felt some of the charm fade away ; one's gregarious instincts faltered before even the faintest thought of a growing garden city. I love my neighbours, but not building houses !

What a coast ! Hyères lacks the joy of a sea frontage, but here the road winds its way for many kilometres

within a yard of the softly lapping waters of the Mediterranean. There are sheltered places which might be corners in paradise, outjutting rocks from which one could dive into twelve feet of clear, sweet water, sandy stretches upon which one could walk barefoot until one's toes were entangled in the strange, large-leaved seaweed with its pungent odour of the ozone.

Following the same route one comes presently to St. Maxime, and I have never yet made up my mind whether St. Maxime is a real place or not ! There is a toy harbour, there are busy cafés with tables reaching out on to the street, notices imploring you to taste the *bouillabaisse* and *friture du pays* of the *maison* ; "mine host," more unreal than his habitation, rotund, waxen-faced, with neatly curled black moustache, the black apron of the *sommelier* preserving his trousers, his coat ridiculously short, the ends of his bow tie flapping round his ears. In his hand is the bottle of wine he is reverently offering to his patrons; in his eyes, as he glances at the passer-by, there is a perpetual wistfulness. There are real men and women, apparently, eating at the tables, real children playing in that tiny square, and in the end you will probably, as I did, succumb, and take a table set out on the edge of the main road which reaches from Marseilles into Italy, gaze frequently across a few yards of shingle to the sea whilst you eat your well-cooked but strangely-tasting food and drink wine a little different in flavour from any you have tasted before. I tried to get on human terms with my host, but found him, though polite, unresponsive, until I mentioned my eternal quest, my thought of some day buying a villa, a villa which must be in the sunshine, where one could be sure of sunshine all the time. It was then that my host took command of the situation. He took off his black apron, sent for a bowler hat, and, my meal being finished, he led me out to my car.

"It is the villa which Providence must have intended for monsieur," he assured me, "for sale by the most

marvellous chance. Monsieur will settle there for the rest of his days, and madame—the inconsolable madame—must sell, or weep her eyes out."

So we drove a little way along the main road, turned in at a brightly painted gate and pulled up before the strangest effort in architecture upon which my eyes have ever rested. It was pink and green ; it had many angles ; it had minarets, cupolas and façades all jumbled together without rhythm or sense of outline. In front was a flower garden in which there were as yet no flowers. There was a tiny vineyard, about twenty metres square, a tiny orchard the trees of which had yet to grow, a strip of grass upon which the livestock of the establishment—a tethered goat—was feeding. It was, as my host explained enthusiastically, "*si complet !*"

And the interior ! Never out of bedlam could one conceive such wallpapers, of an immense design and lurid colouring, furniture of incredible strangeness, a covered-in terrace, built to avoid the sun, with queer chairs, neatly placed in a row and painted a bright vermillion. Madame, in deep mourning—she had just lost her husband—was there at our service, a cambric handkerchief in her hand, tears ready to flow if good might seem to come of it.

And then afterwards, what I said to madame, and what she said to me, how I escaped from the house, how I bade farewell to my host, of what lying laudations I was guilty, what vague promises I made, I simply do not remember. I left St. Maxime more convinced than ever that there is something fantastic about the place, that it has been pushed up, or let down, from another world, and that one day I shall wake up to discover it off the map and shall motor along the road and find nothing there but a peaceful farmhouse or perhaps a *café* ! All the same, it is full, every corner of it, of glorious sunshine.

And then, following the Lower Corniche, which skirts all the time the Mediterranean, there is St. Raphael.

Many people like St. Raphael, and there is no reason why they shouldn't. It has some pleasant-looking shops, one or two attractive hotels, a short and rather overcrowded sea frontage and beyond, villas, miles of villas, very beautiful some of them, but somehow a little pretentious for the wanderer seeking only a simple, pleasant home in the sunshine. Behind, at picturesque Valescure, are golf-links, a little hard going but growing more popular every year. St. Raphael has its devotees amongst the sun-seekers of the world, and without a doubt deserves them. Places, however, are very much like human beings. They attract, they repel or they leave one neutral. I am entirely neutral about St. Raphael ; probably St. Raphael feels the same way about me.

Valescure, on the other hand, has charm and possibilities. It is within a few kilometres of St. Raphael, where even the Blue Train condescends to make a brief halt, and bungalows are being industriously built amongst the pine woods, which have been wisely left undisturbed so far as possible. Here is beautiful air, fascinating glimpses of the Mediterranean, curling into the bays and inlets below, a golf course, rapidly improving, and two excellent hotels on the links themselves. My only fear about Valescure is that it may soon become almost too popular, that the bungalows will multiply until it will rather resemble one of the latest of those garden suburbs with golf club which are suddenly springing up around our own metropolis. But, after all, at Valescure we shall always have the compensation of the softer breezes and constant sunshine, so that when the faintest of west winds comes down from those sheltering hills, the perfume of the pines is shaken into the warmed air.

Still travelling towards my particular Mecca—when one is free from that long arm of villadom which stretches for several kilometres—one comes to some pleasant and livable country where the air is full of sunshine and mists or clouds rarely intrude. Agay is a place which attracts,

and which still possesses many delightful sites for building, and, a little beyond, on the far side of a sweeping bay, is one of the houses of my latter-day dreams. It is a plainly built, Provençal farmhouse standing on the edge of the sea, and, quaintly enough, at the extremity of a little semi-circle of perfectly level meadows which stretch back to the road—not all meadows, though, when one comes to think of it, for there is a vineyard, from the grapes of which I was told the best wine of the neighbourhood was made, a cherry orchard and a small strip of arable land. The place is exactly reminiscent of an exceptionally large and ancient Norfolk farmhouse, of a severer type of architecture than one usually meets with in our own country. Its stained pink walls and deep-red tiles have become mellowed with age; its front abuts almost upon the yellow sands, and behind, in place of a garden, there is an orange grove and an avenue of cypresses. Except for the more exotic vegetation—the vineyard in place of the turnips, the orange grove instead of the apple orchard, the mimosa in place of the lilac—it really might well be an English homestead, a little oasis of restful tranquillity in the midst of a very beautiful but curiously different country. I have wondered every time I have passed along the road wherein lies its peculiar charm. It is difficult to define, for its simplicity is akin almost to baldness. Yet it possesses an air of peace and of gentle luxury, as though the sun for generations had burned its way into the pinkish-grey front and soaked the gardens and meadows with its gentle warmth. It is somewhat pretentiously called the Château d'Agay, and it is not for sale—or I should not have told you about it!

The whole of the seaboard between the outskirts of St. Raphael and Théoule possesses innumerable delightful sites which are veritable sun-traps. The villas immediately upon leaving St. Raphael are very beautiful, very large and very costly. From about three kilometres westwards, however, there is a curving stretch of coast with many

charming little bays, strips of sandy beach and an abundance of pines where the rocks come down to the sea. It is a land of peace, and a paradise for the sea-bather. The property here is nearly all for sale, and prices can be obtained on application to a land agent at St. Raphael. There is in one part a little promontory in a sheltered corner where one could build to the very edge of the sea and where a dive from one's sitting-room windows straight into a pool of deep blue water would be perfectly easy. Land here, for some reason or another, has not been bought with the same avidity as nearer the casino centres, but to the lover of a quiet life it seems to possess even more picturesque and sun-full possibilities.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

*Les Arcades and W. J. Locke, its beneficent Potentate,  
who made it our Cathedral of Pleasure*

TO return to the more intimate side of my own life, or rather the portion of it spent upon the French Riviera, the period spent at the Villa Deveron was perhaps the happiest, although certainly at that time I worked the hardest, so far as story-writing is concerned. Somehow or other no one thinks of the French Riviera as having very much to do with France. It is inhabited by a heterogeneous crowd changing with the seasons, the elect of the world mixing freely with its most amiable profligates. It is a district which has been treated harshly by a certain type of critic, but it is nevertheless unique, full of charm and people who have caught up and developed the gift of living with that sort of gracious ease so well understood by the light-hearted philosophers of Athens and Rome and their predecessors, thousands of years backwards down the avenues of history, of the lost cities of Egypt and China.

The old days of having one's novels pirated in America lay far back in the past. I had the good luck to be in the hands of a publisher in the United States who became a great personal friend, Mr. Alfred McIntyre of the firm Little, Brown and Company. I was in the same position in England with regard to the head of the firm of Hodder and Stoughton—Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams—during his lifetime, and the same pleasant relations have continued, I am happy to say, with his two brothers, successors in the business, Percy and Ralph. The interest of writing for two countries under pleasant auspices revived gradually the enthusiasms of my former days, slightly disturbed perhaps by the war, and set me going again.

I was happily placed at Cagnes both for work and pleasure, Monte Carlo thirty kilometres or so on one side and Cannes even nearer on the other. On the Riviera in those days there was very little villa entertaining. One met one's friends always at the various casinos which took the place of the social clubs of the great cities. For a woman life was made easy. There was no necessity to keep up a large establishment. At nearly every one of the casinos the *cuisine*, service and wines were all excellent. There was always a cabaret show for the elders and dancing for the younger generation. In retrospect, I often fancy that the gambling in this part of the world occupied too much place in the imagination of those who have never actually been residents. I had many friends, even in those days, who frequented the casino regularly but who seldom adventured even a *louis*. There are plenty of other ways of passing the time. The bars are always made attractive, there is music and in the summer-time the casinos, except for the golf, are the centres of all sport. The tennis-courts at Monte Carlo are famous everywhere. It has also a beach and a beautiful swimming-pool. The same can be said of Cannes and, to a lesser extent, Juan-les-Pins. Nice has, architecturally, the most beautiful casino on the coast, but too much money was spent upon its erection, the 1914 war came along and it fell upon evil times. It has now been acquired by the *Société des Bains de Mer*, but it is only open for a comparatively short time during the year. Its theatrical performances, however, are famous and it has a large clientele entirely its own, for one is apt to forget, when thinking of Nice, that besides being magnificently situated by the sea and having one of the longest and most attractive promenades in the world, it is also the fifth largest city in France. It has a large floating population; gambling could be indulged in, up to the last few years, at the lowest possible rates, and there are countless elderly ladies of a type one used to meet at Leamington, Cheltenham and Bath,

who have grown accustomed to find here such gambling as they can afford a pleasanter pursuit than the bridge parties of their native land.

The friendship of which I was proudest, and from which I derived the most pleasure during those earlier residential days on the Riviera, was that of W. J. Locke. He and his wife were our first visitors when we settled down at Cagnes-sur-Mer, and we drifted almost at once into an easy intimacy which lasted for the remaining years of his life.

Les Arcades, the Lockes' villa at Cannes, was, during those days, the centre of literary hospitality upon the Riviera and the rendezvous of many notable visitors. I met there, in the days when their devotion to one another was still a byword, the world's sweetheart and her husband, charming luncheon companions whom I remember, the first day we encountered them, stealing away to a distant corner of the grounds arm in arm when they were wanted to meet some new arrivals. That was in the days before Hollywood had begun to exercise its devastating effect upon its disciples and before divorce had become their afternoon amusement. I lunched there with Otto Kahn, amongst other celebrities, on the eve of one of my visits to New York. He, by the by, was one of my disappointments in life. He solemnly took down the name of the hotel at which I proposed staying in New York and promised me some financial details of which I was in need—I was writing *Up the Ladder of Gold* at the time—and also what was more important still, for it was during the period when Prohibition was at its most noxious stage, a case of genuine Scotch whisky. Neither of these arrived, but I am sure his intentions at the time were excellent.

I met there Edvina, since Mrs. Stuart-Wortley, whose marvellous performance in *Louise* at Covent Garden had been for years one of my treasured recollections. Charming as ever, she is an occasional visitor at my present home

at Roquefort-les-Pins. “Other times other manners,” and she told me that only a few months ago my latest present to her—a sack of potatoes—was more highly prized than some of the pearls of her younger days.

I renewed my acquaintance there, too, with Philip Gibbs, with whom I had last dined, as I have, I think, already recounted, in a château in France where we ate and drank to the sullen roar of heavy enemy artillery, at that time not twelve miles distant, booming in our ears. That *rencontre* at Les Arcades, I remember, led to further festivities at the Villa Deveron, at which were present Philip Gibbs and his wife, Anthony Gibbs, his son, Dana Orcutt, an American man of letters, Somerset Maugham, of whom I was to see still more in later years, and Will Locke himself, together with his clever and attractive wife. For some reason or other everyone was in the humour to talk that day, and we rose from the table on my small wistaria-hung balcony, having taken our places at half-past one, at something like five o’clock. Willie Maugham, who suffers from a very slight hesitation of speech, excused himself on that occasion by remarking, in his dry and inimitable manner, that he was not really a great talker but it took him so much longer to say anything than the average person.

Will Locke took great pride in the possession of what was at that time a novelty—a private cocktail bar—and his wife or adopted daughter took a delight in mixing the cocktails for their guests themselves. Those little gatherings, notwithstanding the presence of an occasional Grand Duke, never lacked the pleasant flavour of bohemianism, for many who called simply for a cocktail were hospitably invited to stay on to lunch, and very few refused. Mrs. Locke’s talents as a hostess amounted almost to genius, for the extra numbers were always provided for and there was never any evidence of a place at the table having been changed.

It is hard to remember the various interesting people

whom I met in that gloriously hospitable centre from time to time. Valentine Williams, most immaculate and certainly the best dressed of authors I ever knew, and his beautiful wife, were frequent callers. Beverley Nichols I met for the first time there and St. John Ervine of the bitter tongue and disarming manner. A sad little paragraph in the morning paper not long ago reminded me that it was here I first met Ray Long, Hearst's head man and editor, then, of the *Cosmopolitan*. He was a difficult fellow to get on with and singularly ruthless, but there were many elements of pathos in connection with his suddenly ended career.

I remember with more pleasure, perhaps, Chamberlain, the first American magazine editor with whom I ever came in contact, and who bought from me, for the *Cosmopolitan*, the first series I ever wrote of stories with the same characters, anticipating even Conan Doyle in his idea of producing such a series. The title of the first series of these stories was *The Long Arm of Mannister*.

At Les Arcades, which was certainly the greatest literary centre for the English-speaking visitors upon the Riviera, James Douglas, the most human, perhaps, of all our great literary journalists, was a frequent visitor. He was editor at the time of the *Sunday Express* and his articles were eagerly sought for and appreciated. Cyril Maude, with his quaint little drawl, was an interesting raconteur at cocktail-time, and Winifred Emery, his wife, looking exactly like the picture of herself twenty years earlier, was never far away. Clara Butt, always with a new system by means of which she was going to make the great fortune which the gramophones later laid at her feet in more worthy fashion, was seldom without a column of figures and a miniature roulette board in her handbag.

There is a certain sadness peculiar to itself in all this delving into memory. I passed Les Arcades only a few months ago. Every blind was drawn, the mimosa and rhododendrons had shed their blossoms, nothing seemed

to remain of the glamour of the place but the changeless fascination of the distant Estérels—mauve and blue, rugged and dramatic, their sharply pencilled outline eternally beautiful. They remain while we and the others pass on. . . .

Elizabeth, Countess Russell, was one of the many charming people I met during this period of my sojourn on the Riviera. Surely there never was a more indefinable, more subtly attractive personality, so quiet in her manners and speech, poignantly yet kindly humorous, irresistibly appealing whenever she lapsed into the personal note. I met her first with my friends the Henry Normans at the Château de la Garoupe and later on at her own villa near Mougins, which later still my wife and I occupied by invitation for six months—a doll's house full of dainty furniture set in the midst of a garden of roses. Sometimes she paid us a visit on my small yacht. Once or twice she had tea with me in our own villa. We had what was to me a very pleasant custom of moving our tea-table along the line of my bookshelves, at each halt taking out a book at random and talking about it. In such a fashion we passed an hour or so more than once in curiously varied company. We could never tell exactly how the books were coming out. Sometimes it was a volume of Sterne or Hazlitt; Coleridge's poems were followed by an odd volume of Bacon; De Quincey and Poe, appropriately enough, were found in close proximity. A volume of Ben Jonson's plays and Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* were certainly unsympathetic neighbours, but there was never a volume, even amongst the lesser known writers, concerning which my guest had not some shrewd and original criticism to make.

It is many months now since I said farewell to Elizabeth on her departure to America. The harsh rumble of the war, distant though it was at that time, had disturbed from the first her gentle spirit. It was a cruel misfortune

that she should have had quartered upon her several companies of Senegalese, in whom she professed to take a great interest and to whom her demeanour was always most kindly, but of whom I think she was always secretly a little afraid. She began to talk often of her eldest daughter who was living in America, and one day she decided, quite suddenly, I think, although she must have been brooding about it for some time, to leave for the States. She begged us to accompany her. Both my wife and I are hopeless optimists. We were still infatuated with our new property at Notre Dame and we could not bear the thought of tearing ourselves away altogether from England and its associations. So there came a day when Elsie and I and Chunkie, Elizabeth's favourite dog —to whom she secretly dedicated her delightful volume *Dogs of My Life*—said goodbye to her, a little thankful, perhaps, that one of the dearest of our friends was choosing the path of safety. Chunkie is still with us, the proud guardian of Notre Dame. He misses us a little, I think, and he misses his real mistress too, I am sure. The question I have so often seen shining out of his honest brown eyes will never be answered.

I am venturing, owing to the request of so many of her friends, to insert here the few memorial words I wrote in her memory in the obituary column of *The Times*:

So “Elizabeth” (Mary Countess Russell) has passed on. She is to be nothing but a memory to those of us who have loved her. We shall grudge America her ashes. For we have no one to take her place. There is no other Elizabeth. A sprite among women, fairy-footed, fairy-eyed, windows through which shone out sometimes all the hidden sweetness of her great genius, of her dear self. She had wit, she had charm, the dainty, flickering charm of one who loves to give but who holds back the best of herself from a world which half the time she was inclined to mock. I can see her now as I last saw her, waiting to greet her luncheon guests at the end

of the double row of irises on a gay April morning—her dogs tumbling about her—a dainty welcoming figure always with some new thing to say, some new *bon mot* with which to embellish her welcome. At the “Mas des Roses,” on the lesser slopes of the Mougins hills, where she lived in her doll’s paradise of a villa, she was a hostess with almost unearthly gifts of sweetness, of gentle hospitality, of never-failing tact. We who were her close neighbours, Elsie my wife, who shared with me for six months the loan of the sweetest and most homelike villa in the world, Elsie who was allowed to take her dogs for walks and now possesses the incomparable Chunkie, I who was permitted the key of her hallowed sanctum, sat in her own marvellous chair before her great desk, and wrote there many stories. We feel we shall never accustom ourselves to the loss of so dear a friend. I fancied her often in her doll’s garden behind, and I was proud to be even a temporary inheritor of her gracious environment. Life will never be quite the same for any one of us three, Elsie, Chunkie or myself, now that she has gone.

For you, Elizabeth, have no successor either in your art or your personality. You were naughty—sometimes very naughty indeed—but you wrapped round your foward words a divine sense of humour, you chose your phrases with epicurean delicacy. In your latest story you tiptoed your way always with a fine and incomparable grace through the three hundred pages which in other hands might have been an ordinary novel. You captured in almost the last of your writings the hearts of a great country who had never taken you seriously enough. Elizabeth, fairy queen of delicate prose, the gentlest and most kindly of all the humorous writers of your sex, pass on to your place among the immortals. You have left behind you here memories that will never die. Even Chunkie has lifted his nose and whined for you in my woods, and for us others there will remain for ever an empty place in our hearts.

Baroness Orczy, too, became a dear and intimate friend. She and her husband, Montagu Barstow, himself an artist of no mean ability, were frequent guests at the Villa Deveron. The last time I saw the Baroness she

told me an amusing incident of her visits to Elstree where a new version of her story *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, to be presented as a talking film, was being done. She took a great interest in the work and was there day after day. One morning Matheson Lang, who was taking the part of Sir Percy, sent for the producer and asked who was the funny little old lady who was always sitting on a step-ladder taking notes. The producer replied that she was the author of the story.

"What is she doing here?" was Matheson Lang's naïve question. "She makes me nervous."

The story appealed to me perhaps all the more because I have so often been the victim of a similar outlook on the part of the actors or producing staff of even the most enlightened film companies. It actually happened to me not long ago in the office of a famous film magnate, after I had signed an agreement for the company to produce a film based on one of my stories, that the head of the establishment said, after having wished me good-morning :

"As soon as we have finished the picture we will give you a private showing at our theatre. Don't come round to the studio before then. It makes the artists nervous to have the authors around!"

Of no one in this flotsam and jetsam world of the Riviera have I preserved more agreeable memories than of P. G. (Plum) Wodehouse and his delightful wife. We began our acquaintance in London and played quite a good deal of golf together down at Woking. Plum Wodehouse's golf was, and would be still, I expect, if he had a chance to play, of a curious fashion. He had only one idea in his mind when he took up his stance on the tee, and that idea was length. He was almost inattentive when his caddie pointed out the line he ought to take or the actual whereabouts of the next hole, but he went for the ball with one of the most comprehensive and vigorous swings I have ever seen. I am certain that I saw him hit

a ball once at Woking which was the longest shot I have ever seen in my life without any trace of following wind. It was, I believe, on a Sunday morning, from the seventeenth tee.

" You will never see that again ! " I remarked, after my first gasp of astonishment, mingled, I am afraid I must confess, with a certain amount of malevolent pleasure as the ball disappeared in the bosom of a huge clump of gorse.

" I wonder how far it was," was the wistful reply.

Well, the Wodehouses were spending the week-end, and I noticed after we arrived at the club-house on the conclusion of our round a mysterious conversation going on between P. G. and his caddie. Late in the evening, the caddie was ushered into my garden. He produced a ball and handed it over.

" Found it half an hour ago, I did, sir," he remarked.

" And did you put the stick in ? " P. G. asked eagerly.

" Right where the ball lay to an inch, sir."

" Got the distance ? "

" Three hundred and forty-three yards, sir," the caddie replied promptly.

There was a glow of happiness in P. G.'s expression. He dragged me down to see where the ball had been found and checked the distance going back. Then he filled a pipe and was very happy.

" Beaten my own record by five yards," he confided with a grin.

" But listen," I pointed out, " how many matches do you win ? "

" I never win a match," was the prompt reply. " I spend my golfing life out of bounds. I never even count my strokes. I know that I can never beat anyone who putsts along down the middle. All the same I get more fun out of my golf than any other man I know when I am hitting my drives."

" Isn't it a little expensive ? " I asked him meaningly.

He produced the pound note we had played for with a smile.

"It's worth it, Opp," he assured me gently.

A great fellow, P. G. I am always hoping that some day, if the gates of the ordinary everyday world are once more opened to us, he will forsake the flat stretches of Le Touquet and come South again. A few years ago he and his wife rented a delightful villa near Grasse and during the season were almost nightly visitors at the Cannes casino. P. G., although he seldom used the Riviera as a background for his inimitable short stories, liked working there and worked well. He liked also his own peculiar form of gambling, which consisted, as I believe it still would if he had the chance to indulge in it, chiefly in walking from table to table, taking a Banco of any size at chemin de fer, or if roulette was more in evidence, backing in *mille* notes a special little combination of his own of red or black associated with the columns. He had a method, too, of covering the board so that only five numbers remained on which he had not staked. I imagine that one or other of those five numbers turned up a little too often, for it is a system which he afterwards abandoned. Tall, broad-shouldered and with a kind of hidden smile, looking more like an Oxford professor than a writer of humorous stories, he still—or rather he did until that wretched day about eighteen months ago—walk about at Le Touquet with a handful of *mille* notes and a studious, I fancy an acquired, habit of seeing no one until he had either won or lost as much as he intended to during the evening. Sometimes it was all over in an hour, then quite a different man strolled over to where his wife was playing baccarat at the big table. If he found her occupied, he was immediately ready for a drink with any of his friends. I believe that it was in the Sporting Club at Monte Carlo that he first evolved that amusing and very convenient way of alluding to a little company gathered round the bar of a public-house when the

characters have not been introduced and names are at a discount. He leaned over one evening and asked me :

“ Who is that long, sandy Gin and Tonic on the corner stool ? ”

A month or so later, in the first of a series of new stories, I noticed with a chuckle that the mixed company in a public-house were all alluded to as “ a whisky and soda ” or “ a brisk-looking gin and tonic ” or “ a pint of bitter ” or “ a weary-looking sherry.”

P. G. has his peculiarities—most of them reasonable ones. I never was able to sympathise, however, with his delight in fresh-water bathing when he was within a few hundred yards of the sea. Furthermore, I could never compose a single line—as he does all his stories—straight on to the typewriter, nor could I risk all the money I could afford for the evening’s amusement in three or four coups and then treat the game as though it had no existence. Golf is still one of his delights, or was until his temporary disappearance, but he almost gave it up down here, where the courses are all a little cramped and scarcely suitable for a man like P. G. who frankly admits that he doesn’t care where he hits the ball or who wins the hole so long as the ball has gone far enough.

P. G. is one of those men we hate to think of confined in a narrow space. Our sympathy is often with him and very real. He had a chance to get away but he scoffed at it. I believe, according to one of his young friends, the last words anyone heard him say was an answer to a young man—the son of Lady Furness—who was begging and imploring him to jump into the waiting car :

“ That’s all right, old chap, I’ll be there in three minutes. Honest.”

Alas, thousands of three minutes have gone by since that carelessly uttered speech.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

*Bread cast upon the Waters in Monte Carlo floated up  
at the Plaza*

IT has always seemed to me that on the Riviera one finds the pressure of life, or rather the capacity for living, intensified. One is either riotously happy or depressed and miserable. One has what seem to be marvellous successes or dismal failures. I remember the agony of failure on a New Year's Eve quite a few years ago. I was giving a supper-party for fourteen people at the Carlton (no longer existent) in Monte Carlo. My principal guests were that most delightfully human of men, the late Alan Parsons, and his lovable wife, Viola Tree, who were spending Christmas with us at the Villa Deveron. The party came streaming in at half-past eleven, and then arrived the catastrophe—the sort of thing that could only happen on the Riviera, when anything that is abnormal in one's make-up seems to force its way to the surface. Two of the ladies, regardless of their host's feelings, refused to sit down at the same table. No imaginable argument would induce either of them to change their minds. In the end, our beautifully balanced party was pulled to pieces and two tables of seven arranged. My wife sat at one and I at the other. Despite the most feverish of efforts—and my wife and I have always prided ourselves that when we really make a great effort we are rather good at a party—this one became more like a funeral feast. We held one another's hands, we wore outrageous caps, we danced strange dances, we did everything we could to develop the spirit of gaiety. Soon after the chimes of midnight sounded, and whilst we were wishing one

another a Happy New Year and all the rest of it, both the charming antagonists indulged in hysterics. They ended up with their arms around one another's necks and nothing would satisfy them but that the table be joined up again. My last recollection of that morning was of the two reconciled ladies holding up the departure of cars from the restaurant, each striving to induce the other to accept an exchange of certain articles of jewellery in token of their renewed friendship.

I always claim that I was on the Riviera but not of it, for I lived in a very simple villa whose great charm was that it was situated upon some quite excellent golf-links, where I spent much more time than I did in the casinos. I had a workroom built in a corner of my garden which abutted on the fairway of the last hole, and in the busy hours I heard many more English and American voices from the players passing my windows than those of any other nationality. Social life exists on different and less formal lines than in England. There is very little ceremony about the place. Friendships are made generally on the basis of a common acquaintance in the casinos, on the golf courses and on the tennis courts. Formal visits are seldom paid, the leaving of cards is only an occasional happening. The telephone is the chief medium both for introductions and invitations. A call on the telephone ; Mr. X from the Hôtel de Paris wants to speak to you ; Mr. X apologises for ringing up, announces himself as a great friend of a great friend in New York who has promised to let you know of his existence. An invitation to lunch follows and a friendship easily established. In such manner I have welcomed very many interesting visitors. I remember most affectionately Arthur Somers Roche, whose early death some years ago was deplored on both sides of the Atlantic, although over here his work was too little known. He was a brilliant conversationalist, a man of quaint and ready wit but with a curiously retiring dis-

position. I had met him in New York and I felt that he recognised me one day when we sat at adjacent tables at luncheon-time in the Café de Paris. I was always grateful for the impulse which led me to stop and ask him, on my way out, whether we had not met in the States.

He reminded me of the occasion, and not only did I discover that it was his first visit to the Riviera, but it also transpired that he had no idea even how to get into the casino or how to play roulette, neither did he speak any French. I took a fancy to him and his charming wife and I devoted the rest of the day to their entertainment. He always declared that from that moment Monte Carlo was a changed place for him. There was scarcely a day when he did not telephone some sort of invitation over to my villa begging us to come to Monte Carlo, and once, when I made the excuse of my car being out of order, he made no immediate reply, but about an hour and a half afterwards a magnificent hired Rolls-Royce appeared in which was seated a courier in the uniform of the Hôtel de Paris, who presented a card addressed to me on which was written : “Yours for twenty-four hours with the proceeds of my backing your numbers last night. Pack your bags, both of you, and come along.”

That was the last night of his first visit, but twelve months afterwards I received a long cable asking me to reserve certain rooms for himself and his wife, servants and two children. I knew he was making a great deal of money, but the sort of accommodation he required at the Hôtel de Paris amounted to such a large sum that when I cabled him I suggested also a suite at a lesser known hotel at half the price. His reply was laconic and characteristic : “Must come Paris. Bringing no hat.” At first I was puzzled, then I remembered the immense satisfaction he had derived from the underground passages leading from the Hôtel de Paris into the gambling-rooms. The idea of going straight from his sitting-room in the hotel to the

roulette table without encountering a breath of fresh air seemed to afford him a peculiar satisfaction.

Two or three years later, any hospitality I had been able to offer Somers Roche—and I had been able to introduce him to a good many people in whom he was interested, W. J. Locke, Somerset Maugham and Baroness Orczy, for instance—was amply repaid. I was in New York and seized upon by the editor of a magazine to which I was a contributor to read over the radio the current chapter of a serial of mine which they were then issuing. The reading was to have commenced at six and my wife and I were to have dined with Somers Roche and his wife at half-past seven at the Plaza. The reading was delayed for two hours owing to some sort of a breakdown and then took much longer than we had expected. It was half-past nine before I had finished. New York was writhing in the agonies of Prohibition. There was no sort of a drink to be had in the radio palace from which I had been speaking and I had no speak-easy cards in my pockets. I was utterly exhausted and I remembered with despair that the only vice Somers Roche possessed was that he drank nothing but water. We drove drearily to the Plaza. People were already leaving the restaurant when we arrived. An obsequious *maître d'hôtel*, who was looking out for us on the threshold, conducted us to a table in the best part of the room, where we were confronted by one of the most gladdening sights I ever witnessed. Our host was standing with outstretched arms, his wife and a few guests had all risen to their feet to welcome us, but more wonderful than all these things, in a city where such offerings were deemed an impossibility—three magnums of champagne were there in ice-pails and a tray of cocktails upon the table ! What a welcome to a fainting man and what a meal ! To add a flavour of quaint coincidence to this occasion, our neighbours at the next table were Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt Barton, acquaintances of ours in Monte Carlo, who afterwards

told us that they had lingered over their dinner to see for whom such magnificent entertainment was being provided.

An incident which amused my friends but made me furious at the time occurred that night, or rather the next morning. It seemed to me that I had only been in bed about an hour when I was awakened from a deep sleep by the ringing of the telephone at my side. I turned on the light and saw that it was just four o'clock. A thin feminine voice with rather a shrill intonation greeted me :

“ Is that Mr. Phillips Oppenheim ? ”

“ Yes. Who are you ? ”

“ You wouldn’t know my name and I am speaking to you from hundreds of miles away. I listened to your talk over the radio tonight.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I just rang up to see if your voice—your real voice—sounded the same. I hope I haven’t disturbed you. Good-night.”

Any pleasing ideas the lady might have had as to the qualities of my voice were probably dispelled by the vigour of my reply.

The principal event in this particular visit to the United States, so far as I was concerned, was that I was given a dinner by the Lotus Club during my stay in New York. This really was a very great distinction, for although the club showed every hospitality to visitors in the artistic professions, they gave only one dinner a year to strangers, and, having a very influential membership, it was considered a great honour to be one of their selected guests. I had already some acquaintance with the secretary, Charlie Price, who called to see me several times and explained all the details of the arrangements. He was a very delightful fellow whom I am afraid I have now completely lost sight of. I know he worked very hard at the arranging of this festivity, and the very fact that he

interested himself in it was sufficient to make it a success. It was, as I previously remarked, during the days of Prohibition, and when he told me that he wanted me to speak for half an hour I pointed out the brutality of asking an Englishman to stand upon his legs for that period of time amongst a company whose greatest accomplishment in life seemed to be facility for ready speech without the inspiration of even a quarter of a glass of wine. He patted my shoulder in a soothing way and all he would say was : "Wait till the time comes, Opp ! You will feel better about it then."

The time, when it did come, I remember, started with a perfect orgy of cocktails in the president's private room, and as cocktails were not thoroughly established at home and were a form of alcohol of which I had had very little experience, I did not feel that they were going to help me very much. However, the dreadful moment came and I was led downstairs with a certain amount of ceremony, installed in the seat of honour and introduced to my right-hand neighbour, who was a judge of the Supreme Court and one of the principal figures in American legal life. In front of us was an enormous drooping maidenhair fern in a gigantic pot, and as the whole of the rest of the tables were decorated with very beautiful flowers I could not help making some remark about this to Charlie Price when he came round at the end of the first course to see how I was getting on. With a peculiar smile, which was always one of his distinguishing features, he leaned over and pulled the maidenhair fern apart in two places. From these two places he produced two enormous tumblers of Scotch whisky still fizzing with the White Rock water which he had added !

"This is our tribute," he announced, "to our two guests of honour."

Judge — helped himself to one of the tumblers, I took the other. There was no one else to toast as no one else had anything in front of him except water, so we

drank solemnly to one another. Somehow, after that the whole proceeding seemed to become easier. Conversation slipped out more readily and my memory re-established itself. When my time for crucifixion came I remembered a good many of the messages I had been given at the Savage Club in London for old friends on the other side. I remembered even a story which Mostyn Piggott had told me to pass on to the club and, having been privately apprised of the fact a few minutes before I had risen to my feet, I was able to pass a few remarks upon the distinction of drinking alone in that brilliant company with the great lawyer who had made himself largely responsible for the passing of the Volstead Decree. This last statement was a fact.

Anyway, the dinner went off marvellously well, especially after the hands of the guests began to make frequent visits to their hip-pockets. I still possess the engraving of myself on a huge menu gazing down ardently at the maidenhair fern when I ought to have been looking at my audience. It was a good dinner, but then American club cooking is always excellent, and I stumbled through my speech more or less successfully owing to the inspiration from underneath the maidenhair fern and the good fellowship of my audience.

By the by, later on I had another great kindness for which to thank Charlie Price besides his tender care of me during that evening. He gave Miss Ina Clare a letter of introduction to me when she came over to England for the first time, and for years afterwards she spoke with enthusiasm of the luncheon I gave her at the Savoy and the interesting group of journalists whom she met there. They included, I remember, two of the wittiest conversationalists of the day—Mostyn Piggott and Fred Grundy.

On two other occasions during this particular visit to the States I remember having to indulge in the pleasurable but nervous task of addressing my hosts *en bloc*. One was at a publishers' luncheon—a function which was, I believe,

at that time held once a month. On this occasion I had Mr. Herbert Jenkins of Little, Brown and Company on one side of me and Mr. Hewlings Brown on the other. With both of these gentlemen I had formed a very pleasant friendship during my previous visits so I felt very much at home. The nature of the speeches, too, was entirely light-hearted and conversational. I remember this luncheon chiefly because it was the first time I ever met Mr. George Doran and also because of a few very kindly and eloquent words from Mr. Putnam, whom I am afraid is no longer alive. It was a luncheon of chaff, and I remember being alluded to as the wandering lamb who had his first story pirated by an avaricious American publisher and then tumbled into the hands of the sharks between whom he was now seated. As Jenkins was one of the mildest-looking men I have ever seen and Hewlings Brown one of the largest-hearted and kindest men breathing, the gibe was received by their fellow publishers with a great deal of applause.

The other occasion was when I was invited to the weekly luncheon of a kind of Rotary Club existing in those days in Boston, composed entirely of business men. The rule was that no speech should exceed ten minutes. The gentleman who proposed my health spoke for five-and-twenty minutes, during the latter part of which time he was continually shouted at by refractory members ; so when I rose, watch in hand, and already half an hour late for another important appointment, I simply said that the one thing I had been told was that I must always obey the rules strictly of any American gathering I was invited to attend, and as I was already a quarter of an hour to the debit, I would ask them to consider the last quarter of an hour of my predecessor's speech, in which he had kindly said all the things I had wished for many years to have an opportunity of saying about myself, as having come from me and to leave it at that. A *blague*, but I got away with it !

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Last Night at the Old Sporting*

MY visit to the United States, an account of which is given in the last chapter, was only a brief one, and in a few months' time I was back again at the Villa Deveron at Cagnes-sur-Mer playing a little golf and tennis and also getting on with my work.

One morning we received a telephone message from Somerset Maugham's secretary inviting us to tea that afternoon to meet some interesting people. Naturally, we accepted. Everyone on the Riviera accepts an invitation from Maugham at any time they are lucky enough to receive it, for they are always sure of being entertained. On this occasion it was a strange little gathering we found on the large piazza—the King and Queen of Siam, the King with a retinue of four or five, the Queen with only a single lady-in-waiting. The King, with that memory which seems to be part of the paraphernalia of royalty, remembered a chance meeting years ago when I visited Eton one Saturday afternoon with a lady whose son was in the same House. He proved an interesting, almost a fascinating companion. Notwithstanding his somewhat diminutive size and dusky complexion, he carried himself with distinction and naturally spoke perfect English. His first enquiry was concerning the writer of *The Lacquer Lady*. I was able to tell him that Tennyson Jesse was a great friend of mine but that she was, alas, away from the Riviera at the moment. He spoke highly of the book, every page of which he said he had found interesting. At a later stage, during the service of tea, I told him how interested we had been,

during a recent visit to his capital, in a company of Siamese dancers who had performed in a private pavilion, almost hidden in the grounds but attached to the principal hotel at Bangkok. Their dancing had had a peculiar charm and one had felt convinced that by their contortionate efforts they were seeking to express something which escaped the casual looker-on. Their departure after the performance had seemed odd to our Western ideas. They left still wearing the robes in which they had danced, most of them smoking cigarettes, escorted by a male guard in uniform into a large vehicle somehow resembling a station bus. They had taken their places looking neither to the right nor to the left. Two attendants in livery guarded the door, two sat in front with the chauffeur. In such fashion, with expressions utterly blank and eyes like unreflecting looking-glasses set in faces smothered in powder, they were driven away into the darkness. Whither, I wondered? They had just disappeared.

The King smiled. I think that he guessed the nature of my speculations.

"They were driven," he told me, "to one of the wings of my palace where they live under the protection of the State. There is," he added with a twinkle in his eyes, "no night life in my city."

Another writer he asked me about was J. B. Priestley, who was present but a little shy. Later on during the meal I asked permission to change places with him and was glad to find that they seemed mutually interested.

Our host was chiefly occupied with the Queen, a circumstance not to be wondered at, for Her Majesty, although diminutive, is charming in face, figure and conversation. She plays tennis, too, in quite a pleasant fashion. This reminds me of an incident which happened a few days later. The secretary of the Country Club at Monte Carlo, where a tournament was in progress, touched me on the shoulder and invited my wife and myself to

come and see a match which he thought might interest us on one of the back courts. We followed at once and found that it was one of the heats of the tournament in which Austin was playing with the Queen of Siam against a couple of local players of mediocre ability. It was the strangest performance I have ever seen. Her Majesty, when she played tennis, evidently liked to play it. She took up her own position on the court and kept it, and any unusual strategy on the part of her partner, such as a rush to the net or a leaning towards her own little kingdom, seemed to fill her with surprise. I don't suppose Austin had ever played that sort of tennis since he took up the game seriously, and in the end he became thoroughly bewildered. He served double faults, he netted continually and even his efforts at placing were failures. At odd intervals, of course, there came one of his brilliant strokes which the couple on the other side made no attempt to deal with, but, alas, they came too seldom and the end of the set was a crushing defeat. The Queen passed me on her way off the courts and gave me a dazzling smile.

"I not play well, no?" she asked.

"Indeed, Your Majesty, you played very well," I assured her. "It was your partner who was evidently nervous. I never saw him play worse in my life."

She passed on, apparently a little comforted, to where the King was waiting for her. He was at all times, when they were on the tennis court, at any rate, her most punctilious escort.

Monte Carlo tennis suffered a terrible loss with the passing of George Butler. He was a generous patron of the game and he was responsible for bringing there many of the great stars of the day. At his luncheons I have met, amongst others, Tilden, who has a most attractive personality. The last time I saw him he had just written a novel, a copy of which he sent me. Then there was

perhaps the most picturesque, although the most temperamental player who ever reached the front rank—Mademoiselle d'Alvarez—whose tennis was always a joy to witness. I was her guest the last time she played in one of the big tournaments at Cannes, but it was just before the illness which kept her from the game for some time and she was not at her best. I hear now that, notwithstanding her retirement from Wimbledon, she is playing almost as well as ever. Certainly her health must have improved, for the last time I saw her, which was when she walked one morning into the tiny bar at the Embassy some years ago, she presented a most attractive appearance.

Another woman whose tennis and personality is most attractive and who is an even more constant habitué of the Riviera courts and the Sporting Club, is Phyllis Satterthwaite. She has a constitution of iron, a most delightful disposition in private life, but she is one of the dourest women to play against I have ever known. She attempts no impossible shots but she represents more completely the robot-like player than any of the first-class players of modern days. She has brought lobbing to a fine art, and the day you see her serving double faults you are just as likely to see a pair of pink elephants on the courts.

Suzanne Lenglen, greatest of all these, deserves a place to herself and she shall have it. Besides, she belongs to a different group of reminiscences. My most pleasant memories of her were of the days when she swam from the beach at Garoupe out to my small yacht, which I kept there for many summers, for cocktails and gossip. She spoke perfect English, she was a delightful conversationalist and no visitor was ever more welcome. My last meeting with her was one very hot May when we shared a cave together at an alfresco luncheon given by Commodore and Mrs. Beaumont on their beach; they entertained a great deal at their charming villa in those days. There is no woman I have ever met who possessed

more charm than Suzanne Lenglen, but I never happened to see her play tennis.

It is hard to leave these sketchy reminiscences of Monte Carlo tennis without mention of the King of Sweden, a very familiar figure on the courts, especially at tournament time, during the last decade. His Majesty seemed to adopt very much the same tactics as I myself, in my private enjoyment of the game at country houses in England, amongst my friends and on my own court at Cagnes-sur-Mer, have adopted over a similar period of years. In choosing his partner for a men's foursome, the King selects one of the longest-legged and most energetic of the younger generation, hands over to him two-thirds of the court and, selecting the remaining space, in which an undignified acceleration of action is not probable, plays such shots as come to him with a certain amount of undoubted skill. If his partner, flying across the court to cover the additional territory handed over to him, fails at any time, there is always the same exclamation, one upon which only a King would ever have ventured :

“ Pity you didn’t leave that one to me ! ”

However, *Anno Domini* covers a multitude of minor irritabilities, and to play in first-class tennis at all at the age of seventy-five is a feat to be proud of. Somehow or other, though, I fancy that he will not be seen again on the Monte Carlo tennis courts.

In mixed foursomes His Majesty’s frankly expressed desire for victory was influenced a little by his *penchant* for the other sex. In other words, he chose his partners for their appearance upon the courts as well as for their skill. He preferred both if he could get them, though.

The Monte Carlo of today has lost much of its glamour, owing partly, no doubt, to the withdrawal of its monopoly for roulette, which may now be played in almost any casino of France. But to those who knew it at its best, the memory of it will never perish. It was a land of

fallacies, of artificial fashions—a miraged paradise. Nevertheless, it offered what many a tired soul and broken heart has asked for—distraction. Here was the cup of exuberant life to be had for the drinking. To many, its quaffing has been worth the faint aftermath of poison, the shadow which always dogs the footsteps of the deliberate and over-self-conscious pleasure-seeker.

I was one of those who worked hardest for the confinement of roulette to the Principality of Monte Carlo. I wrote articles in every paper I could think of likely to take an interest in such matters—the *Continental Daily Mail*, the *Bystander* and many others—pointing out the huge sums of money the *Société des Bains de Mer* had spent upon beautifying Monaco, her public baths which are quite unique even though now they are so little used, her beautiful streets and squares, the constant care given to her flower gardens, her picturesque police, the cleanliness and perfect discipline of the place. No other community in the world has spent so much, and so tastefully, upon its buildings, its staff of croupiers, its schemes for keeping hidden the darker side which sometimes follows upon unsuccessful gambling. Monte Carlo, I insisted, deserved special consideration from the hands of the law-makers. There were many others who said the same thing, felt the same and wrote to the same effect. Nevertheless, we lost the day. Certain influences, chiefly financial, were irresistible. Roulette tables were opened at practically every one of the gambling resorts of France. Since that day the game for me has lost much of its glamour. It is, of course, a stupid game, requiring not the slightest display of intelligence. It is a game entirely of inspiration. The swarms of people who have beggared themselves by bringing home strange systems from Chinese mathematicians, Tibetan sages and all manner of students of the occult, are simply crazy. There is no system that can be applied with any degree of success to roulette. There are no schools of croupiers who can exercise any important

control over the ball. Such as it is, it is a fair game, played with only moderate odds in favour of the bank. There are many other games of chance. I have tried a good many of them in a small way, but I have never yet experienced the same pleasure in any of them as in winning an *en plein* with all the *chevaux* and *carrés*, and, to make the whole thing perfect, also the *transversales* and even chances. Personally, it was very seldom that I troubled, except on a winning night, to go the whole hog. “*Quatorze et les Chevaux*” was my favourite bet, sometimes including the *transversale simple* and the *carrés*. At Monte Carlo every one of the tables in the Sporting Club and the casinos are subject to continual scientific examination and no table is likely to turn up one number more often than another. It is a game of pure hazard. Of course, one has one’s weaknesses for particular numbers or it would not be worth playing. These preferences are founded only on the memory of past wins and a sort of dogged fidelity which is, after all, I think, one of the characteristics of our race.

Which reminds me that when I started playing roulette at Monte Carlo, which was about forty-three years ago, I met there in the rooms a friend from my part of the world in Norfolk—Critchley Samuelson. He had an amiable presence, a very friendly disposition and a particularly attractive and well-dressed wife. He had also a son who gained the rank of colonel whilst he was still a young man—Ronald Critchley Samuelson—whom one saw little of because he was a great traveller. For twenty or thirty years C. S. and I had our little gamble together whenever we met down at Monte Carlo. He was my senior, and when I went to see him in his last illness, he pressed my hands, there was a gleam in his eyes and a faint smile. “Don’t forget that old *quatorze*, Opp,” he begged.

I never have forgotten it. My favourite numbers have always been fourteen, seven and twenty-nine. There

came an evening—it was while the old Sporting Club was still in existence—when I brought off an *en plein* on *quatorze*. A young man whose face seemed somehow familiar to me was on the same number. We divided the spoils. Afterwards he came round and patted me on the shoulder. "You don't remember me, Mr. Opp," he said. "You used to know my father well at Sheringham. I am glad to see you are sticking to his old number, 'Quatorze.'" We did, I think, what any two average Englishmen would have done. We celebrated our joint victory at the bar, with an unspoken thought as we raised our glasses.

Another blow my fondness for roulette received, although it was not a fatal one, was when, in the height of its prosperity, the *Société des Bains de Mer* built their new palace of a Sporting Club and discarded altogether the old premises. Of course, women as handsome were until lately still to be seen in the new palatial rooms, toilettes as marvellous, jewellery as wonderful, yet nothing can shake the memory of Otero opposite me one night wearing those priceless pearls which, I believe, she only kept for a few short years, her eyes like brilliant stars, a queen amongst women, gloriously beautiful for those brief years of her perfection. In the same period, I remember, too, the little hush in the Rooms at about ten o'clock when a royal party from the small restaurant below swept up the stairs—the Queen of Sweden followed by her six ladies-in-waiting. People made way for them automatically. One cannot fancy in these days a Queen showing herself in the Sporting Club attended in such stately fashion. I have sometimes wondered whether His Majesty, who years ago was a constant attendant at the tables, ever thinks of those days, ever feels the thrill of that openly displayed little burst of magnificence.

One word or two more of the old Sporting Club and I will shut it out of my memory. I remember Lady

Kekewich, who presented me on the threshold of the small bar there to the King of Sweden, whom she was entertaining to dinner. There was no more beautiful woman or a more graceful to be seen in those days and no more charming companion and raconteur than Sir Trehawke Kekewich, her husband. He had an estate with the quaint name of "Peamore," in Devonshire, and asked me to shoot more than once. They have nothing to do, however, with my last memories of the old Sporting. These are somewhat poignant and deserve a paragraph or so to themselves.

I do not exactly remember who was present beyond the three or four who had been my immediate neighbours all through that evening. One was the Duke of Westminster, playing in his usual style with his hand full of *mille* notes which he placed in leisurely fashion and always in maximums either upon the colours or two-to-one chances. Then he strolled away to the bar, or perhaps the *chemin de fer* table and took any *banco* that was being offered. Often he had to be fetched back to collect winnings which seemed to us humbler devotees of the game enormous, and left the pockets of his dinner-coat bulging. René Léon was also at the table, although only, as usual, supervising ; a Russian whose name I have, alas, forgotten ; the inevitable Berry Wall and, unless my memory is at fault, Lord Rothermere, although it was before the days of his peerage. As the Rooms thinned out, a rumour went around that this was to be the last night, the Rooms were to be closed the next day and the new Sporting Club, which was now completed, was to be opened at once. The hour was late and the croupier announced "*les trois derniers*." There was a revolution in our little community. No one ever wanted to go to bed in Monte Carlo. One of us appealed to René Léon. He shook his head doubtfully at first but ultimately gave way. He gave permission for the table to be kept open another hour. Within that hour I won more than I have ever

won before at any game of chance. At the last spin but one I had, for me, quite a considerable stake on number seven and the *chevaux*. It turned up. I collected my winnings and instructed the croupier to double. Just as the ball started rolling, the chef touched me on the shoulder and pointed out that my stake was out of order and that the double had exceeded the maximum. I protested that it was too late now to refuse the stake as the ball was already spinning. There was a little good-humoured expostulation and finally the presiding genius shrugged his shoulders and announced : “*Ça va, monsieur.*” Seven repeated. I am perhaps one of the only members of the Sporting Club who has ever been paid, and been paid graciously, for a stake which was not in order. It brought my winnings that night—remember this was only roulette and not baccarat or any of those real gambling games—to just over five thousand pounds, which was to me a fortune.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *The Raid of the "Franconia"*

AN episode occurred just about this time which might be worth recounting. It is a proof, at any rate, of the adventurous spirit of the American woman, whether bound in the bonds of holy matrimony or not.

My wife and I motored into Monte Carlo one afternoon to attend a dinner-party given by a well-known hostess to the King of Sweden, a pleasant function to which we had been looking forward for some time. It was after the Opera season, so we had given up the small flat we usually occupied at the Hôtel de Paris for a month in the year and took in with us only clothes for one evening. We went up to see our rooms ; my wife paid a call at the *coiffeur's* whilst I had my hair cut and afterwards we met in the bar to have a cocktail before changing, always rather an amusing thing to do because you were certain to meet your fellow guests for the evening. We found the place invaded by a very pleasant crowd of American tourists, mostly ladies, talking at the top of their voices, obviously very pleased to be there and anxious to be friendly with everyone. Suddenly, just as one is swept off one's feet on a sandy shore by one of those curious waves on what seems to be a perfectly still day, we both felt ourselves bombarded by a storm of greetings, hand-shakings and embraces. It appeared that the tourists had landed from the *Franconia*, the fashionable tourist ship of the day, only an hour ago and included amongst their number were many old school friends of my wife, some of whom, indeed, had been at our wedding. I am afraid we were rather a nuisance to the habitués of the place,

but as we were not strangers there, they were all very kind and considerate. Many tables were jammed together, practically the entire staff took my orders, although I had many a battle royal with the male section of the invaders as to who should be host, and eventually something like sixty or seventy cocktails were provided and disposed of in about as many seconds. I dropped out of the lists for the next lot, which were provided by a lady and her daughter—Mitchell, I think their name was. All the American ladies were talking with rapture of their cruise. Suddenly the same idea seemed to seize them all.

“Else,” I heard one of my wife’s old school friends declare, “you ought to come along !”

Naturally, she laughed, but there was wistfulness in her expression. Like all her compatriots, she is a devoted traveller, and although I had shown her the Continent pretty well, we had never at that time been further East than Ceylon.

“China !” Mrs. Mitchell called out. “China, Elsie ! Peking—the Great Wall . . .”

“Japan !” her daughter echoed.

“Bangkok,” a meticulously dressed friend of my wife’s former days murmured, twirling a carefully tended moustache.

“Angkor !” a distant cousin called out in ecstasy. “Elsie, I remember you saying that you would be content to die if you could once see Angkor !”

The chorus swelled and swelled. I looked upon it as a joke for some time, until I saw that my wife was really beginning to feel the urge of it all.

“How could I possibly ?” she cried. “Phillips wouldn’t let me, for one thing.”

There was a chorus of jeers.

“That comes of marrying an Englishman !” one of them exclaimed. “Wouldn’t let you indeed !”

I suddenly felt a very soft arm around my neck. The girl whom I decided was the prettiest in the whole party

leaned her cheek against mine. It was an unforgettable moment.

"Please, Phillips, let her come," a voice like music whispered in my ear.

"You will have to stay and look after me, then," I replied.

"But Phillips, darling, I'm on my honeymoon," she protested. "I don't think Dan would like it at all."

"But think of my loneliness," I pleaded, glancing reflectively across at Dan, well over six feet tall and connected with Harvard football, I seemed vaguely to remember.

"You'll do all right here in Monte Carlo," my flaxen-haired enchantress declared, patting my hand.

"Elsie," she called out, "he has consented!"

The whole thing was becoming serious. Every objection I could put forward, every protest of my wife, was swept away. The whole of that little gathering and, it seemed to me, the barmen, the waiters and one or two acquaintances who had chipped in, appeared to have made up their minds that the proposal was one of the most natural affairs possible.

"If she wants to see a little more of the world before settling down with an old fogey like Opp," my wife's oldest friend butted in, "why shouldn't she? Elsie, I'm with you all the time!"

"But you're off before midnight and I haven't any clothes," Elsie declared helplessly.

"You can buy them as you go along, dear," Ann Mitchell told her. "Shopping in those quaint Eastern places is lots of fun."

"We came in to a dinner-party," I remarked a little weakly.

"We'll give Elsie a dinner-party every night of her life," Ann Mitchell insisted.

Well, I am never quite sure who had the last word and how it came about, but finally I realised that I had

consented and found myself telephoning to my bank manager to know if he could open up the premises for me. There was not the slightest trouble about that, and presently my wife's maid, whom fortunately she had brought in with her, was seated in the car bound for the villa, inundated by last-minute instructions. Then, the party to a certain extent having broken up, my wife and I sat down at a little table, ordered cocktails and talked things over quietly together.

"If you have any real feeling against it, Phillips," she said earnestly, "I will give up the idea with pleasure. Otherwise I really don't see why I shouldn't go. You will never be happy taking all that time off from your work to visit the places I want to go to whilst I am young enough. As a matter of fact, you hate sightseeing and you would loathe a tourists' ship."

"If," I replied, "you are sure that this one expedition will cure that wanderlust for ever, you can go and welcome. I am having a draft made out. Mrs. Mitchell and Ann tell me there is a beautiful little suite next theirs they are sure you can have. It is, of course," I added, "a great opportunity."

"You will go to the dinner?" she asked anxiously.

I made rather a wry face. It was not a pleasant thing to have to do but it had to be faced. We ended by concocting a little note to our hostess, which I was to deliver in person and then stay and dine *seul* if it did not spoil the table. My wife went up to her room to pack her dressing-case and I made my way to the bank. The manager had the *Franconia's* itinerary and I found a letter of credit for the sum I had asked for already filled in. I returned to the hotel, had my bath and changed, spent a quiet hour listening to household injunctions and presented myself at the appointed time in the reception room of the Sporting Club. My hostess shook her fist at me gaily when I went in alone.

"Quite all right," she assured me. "You had better

make your personal apologies to His Majesty. For the rest, I rather admire your wife's spirit. You can sit out the first course with us and then slip away. You're sitting next to an old friend so I am sure she will excuse you."

The fashionable dinner hour fortunately was earlier in those days, and at ten-thirty that evening my wife and I found ourselves walking arm in arm up and down the dock at Monte Carlo, both doing our best to pretend we were a little more cheerful than we were. The *Franconia* tug was lying alongside and presently a little group of Elsie's friends came hurrying towards us.

"Elsie, dearest, you will have to come. This is the last tug and the master wants to get off."

"But, my dear," Elsie protested, "I can't come yet. My luggage hasn't arrived! I never had any idea that you were sailing so early."

There was a babble of conversation.

"How far away is your villa?" an officer of the tug enquired.

"It's on the Cagnes golf-links," I told him, "about thirty-three kilometres away. The maid left here two hours ago by car and she only had one trunk to pack and some oddments to put together. The car must be back directly."

"I can only wait another ten minutes," the officer said firmly. "They are very strict about time here and the tide will be against us after midnight. We shall be leaving the dock at once."

"Well, my wife can't go without her clothes," I observed a little hopefully.

Watches were produced, everyone wanted to know exactly how far the villa was away and what horse-power car we had. Passers-by became interested and mounted the stone wall to get a better view of the mountain road down into the Principality. At last the captain of the tug came over to the side and summoned me.

"I will have to go, sir," he announced. "I am very sorry, but I am a quarter of an hour after time."

"Are you sure that you are the last tug?" Ann Mitchell asked.

"Absolutely certain, miss," was the firm reply. "I am the first and last. There's only one launch running, and if you are going to join the ship, miss, you had better get in. Come along!"

There was a wild attempt at kidnapping my wife, but keen though she was to go, she would have nothing to do with that. The tug blew one last shrill whistle and backed slowly away. We exchanged glances. We were both half smiling, but Elsie was inclined to be indignant and there was something which looked suspiciously like tears in her eyes.

"I can't help wondering what Marie is about!" she exclaimed. "It makes one look so ridiculous to go back again."

Just at that moment I caught sight of something up in the hills. I scrambled on to the wall and looked from there. Then I jumped down.

"She's coming," I shouted. "I know, because that left-hand light is a little out of line."

I turned to a boatman nearby.

"Isn't there another tug in the harbour?" I asked.

"I hoped you would ask that, monsieur," the man said with a grin. "I am ready to start at once. We shall not be five minutes after the launch."

"Come alongside," I ordered.

Well, in a quarter of an hour we found ourselves in what seemed to be a sort of converted coal barge, but I think we should have welcomed it whatever it was. A filthy-looking boy was tugging with all his might at a rope which pulled a whistle, and we were being cheered on by all the small crowd in the harbour. Suddenly we heard something that was, to us, like music. The long siren from the *Franconia* blew out her summons once more

in a different key. Three times she blew for all she was worth. The man at the wheel leaned over to me.

"She sees us arrive, monsieur. She is waiting for us."

We drew nearer and nearer. The ship side was lined with cheering people. We waved till we were exhausted and they waved back again. I had no voice left. As we drew nearer slowly we saw the gangway being lowered.

"All is well, monsieur," the boatman told us. "They have stopped lifting the anchor. They are letting the gangway down now."

We blundered up to the side. A forest of hands pulled my wife from the boat. Farewells were said, the luggage was all on board and a whistle sounded. We were just backing out when an officer leaned over the side of the ship.

"Mr. Oppenheim," he called out.

I raised my hand. I had few words left.

"Captain's compliments. He's staying another half-hour. He would like to make your acquaintance. Will you come on board and look at the ship?"

There was only one possible answer. Up I climbed. Everyone embraced me, everyone wanted me to drink whiskies and sodas or champagne. We seemed suddenly to have become the hero and heroine of a wonderful escapade. The captain wrung my hand when the half-hour was up and assured me that he would take great care of my wife and promised me she would have the best time of her life. Everyone pledged themselves to the same thing. I kissed more attractive strangers—my wife has always told me that I showed discrimination—than ever before in my life. But the end came. I found myself bobbing away in a dirty, smelly little boat. A row of white handkerchiefs fluttered from the ship's side. My wife was going round the world. I, on the other hand, was going to close the villa, keep only my one servant and transfer myself to the small yacht *Echo*, my latest and most treasured acquisition.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Fugitive Memories of our lost Paradise*

THERE were several months during the period immediately following my wife's return from her travels, when I spent what I think must always be considered as the happiest months of my life. The small boat which I had bought not long before her departure was a great success. That ceaseless craving for new things and a new fashion of life, which is a form of torture to so many of us, was unexpectedly gratified. I found myself living neither in a villa, a palatial hotel, nor any previously experienced form of habitation. My days were mostly spent in the sea, my nights on the deck of that small yacht, the *Echo*, in ozone and pine-scented air with the star-canopied sky for a ceiling and the woods and shelving beach of Garoupe for walls.

This has always seemed to me a miracle period. Months set apart in my life, neither exactly like the past nor particularly pointing forwards towards the future. I do not think that my wife on her return quite shared my enthusiasm for this informal manner of living, but it appeared to me that, after searching in many countries of the world, I had found the perfect summer climate. There were drawbacks at odd times when rollers of the Mediterranean lashed by a sudden east wind came racing into the bay and we listened with anxiety to the creaking and straining of our anchors. Even now I awake sometimes in the night and fancy that I can hear the disturbed voice of my *matelot*, awakened rudely from his sleep.

“*C'est le vent d'est, monsieur. Il faut partir tout de suite.*”

This meant a rapid departure and a troublous voyage across the mouth of the bay to the safety of Antibes harbour. Many a time we were very glad to get there. Then there were moments of disquietude when from behind the Estérels came the scorching mistral carrying the *cafard* on its wings and the swell of an uneasy sea beneath. They came simply to remind one that Paradise was not all too easily gained. Three days' discomfort and the perfect life recommenced.

I never expect to see a more wonderful sight than the Mediterranean coast from the deck of a yacht on a summer night. From partly hidden Cannes there was an unbroken line of lights tracing with a fiery finger the outline of the Golfe, shorewards past Juan les Pins and out to the Cap.

Those were nights of peace and joy and happiness. The throbbing of music from a dozen dance orchestras of the smaller cafés, even from the casinos themselves, seemed to fill the air with a sort of quivering background of vague yet concerted melody. Discords of every sort blended — murmurous waves of a dozen different sorts of harmonies. Nearer, one could almost pick up the rhythm of the dance music and follow the movements of hundreds of swaying figures. Here and there, behind the alluring lights of the Casino at Juan, one could catch an even clearer glimpse of the dancers themselves. . . . Then back again homewards, which meant to Garoupe, up past the silent Cap, after which there came into sight the whole semicircle of the far-spreading Nice Promenade—seven miles of lights culminating in the jetty casino and tailing off then to the harbour itself. In the quieter waters of the Cap, where the great villas lay seemingly at rest and we went drifting idly by, fishermen with blazing torches were catching *loup*. On the rocks and in the sheltered sandy spits lovers lay about in the moonlight. All the fishermen seemed to have melodious voices and every girl played on the guitar. Back again in Garoupe Bay, stealing up to our green-painted anchorage, one had the

sense of having reached home. . . . The pulling up of a buoy, the fastening of a rope, the splash and then silence. Just the lull and gurgle of the waves to soothe one to sleep. In an hour or two, sometimes far too soon, there would be that thin pencil of light over Cap Ferrat, the slowly breaking dawn from behind the saffron and heliotrope coloured clouds, a muffled voice, the trampling of naked feet on deck, the starting of the speed-boat and the *matelot* off on his early trip to Antibes market for the day's supplies.

Those days and long sweet nights had another charm, too, for it was during this period that I came once more into contact with my old friend, Henry Norman, whose wife owns the Château de la Garoupe, the most important and picturesque of all Riviera abodes. Henry Norman, regardless of his unbelievable seventy-five years, would swim from his own landing-stage to my boat and afterwards depart with a dive from the side so straight as to be the envy of many of my younger guests. We discussed plays a great deal at that time and my neighbour read me the whole of the manuscript of *Will No Man Even Understand?*—a play for whose production he was too impatient to wait and which, therefore, appeared only in volume form. We had many long and unforgettable conversations in the soft, languorous evenings. In our friendship I was the gainer at every point. Henry Norman had travelled far more than I and during his brief diplomatic and journalistic career had met far more interesting people than I had ever done. We made many plans in those sweetly passing hours when the path of romantic accomplishment seemed so facile and easy to tread. Henry was planning a drama in those days which I do not think that he ever seriously commenced. I too had visions of a play, which seems to have floated away. We had an idea that somewhere or other the two would coalesce and we should make a collaboration of them. Still, it is always an inspiration to talk about the things we mean to do

even if we realise that we lack the final energy of accomplishment.

Fay Norman, Henry's accomplished and most attractive wife, liked better to come in her picturesque green bathing-suit and floppy hat in a tiny canoe so light and fantastic that I am sure no other woman save she could have stepped safely from it on to my gangway. I am back again now, even as I write, swimming sometimes in the same waters, living in wholly sterner surroundings, thinking often with envy of the smooth passing of those halcyon days. Pleasure, then, seemed to exist almost as an atmosphere. One acquired the habit of effortless but joyous existence. It was a very wonderful thing to dream and talk as one felt inclined, dine with the last of the setting sun sinking behind the violet-capped mountains, linger through the too brief quiet twilight, finish one's wine, smoke, sip coffee and sometimes a little old brandy in those wonderful hours of the softly falling night. Books, women, friendships, pictures—one seems able, in those quiet epochs of almost epicurean meditation, to be reconciled to much that is evil in life, to feel the refracted glow of wondrous moments, beautiful places and half-realised successes passing through one's pulses like music. What a blessed storehouse our memory might be if only we had the courage and inspiration to unlock its sealed doors a little oftener, spring-clean it of its uglier moments and dwell only upon its happy interludes.

There was nothing during the whole period of those exquisite days and the framework of their perfect surroundings to compare with the long hours of priceless conversation, the intense pleasure of this particular friendship, but Henry Norman was still a man with vivid interests in life which called him elsewhere. The time came when blinds masked the hospitable windows of the Château. One heard no longer the pleasant call of his voice from the landing-stage. Henry was back in London or in the

North Country, taking his place on the Board of one of the many companies with which he or his father-in-law were connected.

We had still, however, at odd times, many delightful visitors on board the *Echo*. Suzanne Lenglen, for one, reappeared—Suzanne whom I boldly declare to have possessed, in her delightfully modelled bathing-suit, the most beautiful figure of a woman I have ever seen in my life. It was a joy to see her moving, a happiness to mix a cool drink for her and listen to her pleasant voice. Patricia Frere Reeves, the daughter of my old friend Edgar Wallace, and her agreeable husband were more than welcome as often as they found time to pay us a visit. “Pat,” as nearly everyone calls her, is beloved and popular wherever she goes. She has her father’s slightly blunt charm of manner. She looks you in the eyes very much as *he* looked at life and as, I am sure, he looked at death when it made its sad and premature appearance. The Sax Rohmers were a good-looking couple. He always with fresh roulette systems, or rather modifications of the one which he declared that he had really brought home from China, which was the work of an old magician and in which he seemed to have an almost childish faith. I think, however, that he found the writing of those ingenious Chinese romances more profitable in real life. Eric Loder and his fascinating wife were occasional visitors and always welcome, the latter with her unerring taste in bathing-costumes and beach outfits, easily the best turned-out water-nymph of the South, as someone—I think it was Noel Coward—once called her, and Eric with his priceless sense of humour. He and I shared a mutual passion for Grock, the clown, who in those days was performing in the neighbourhood continually and with great success. Madge Titheradge and Dion, her clever but unlucky husband, were always very welcome callers. The last time I saw him, he talked so enthusiastically about the play he was about to produce, his disappointment in which was

such a tragedy. Mistinguett of the priceless legs, insured for a fabulous sum, and Josephine Baker, with her sinuous beautiful body, were great attractions on the Garoupe beach in those days. To my amazement, by the by, I saw the former calmly entering the water at Garoupe only a short time ago and looking as though the march of the years and the thunderous roar of disaster with which the world is shaking had left her entirely unappalled. As for the latter, I have only seen her once since, and that was on a somewhat curious occasion. It was her first night at the Café de Paris in London and for some reason or other there was a section of the Anglo-American audience which received her with disfavour. It was, I heard afterwards, simply a prejudiced attempt to revive the old question of colour. There were distinct signs of disapproval amongst the audience which one or two of us tried to drown by more vigorous applause. Afterwards Nelson Keys, who always delighted in some good-natured action of this sort, came over to my table with a written protest and a complimentary little message to Josephine Baker which he asked me, as one of the audience, to sign. I did so with the greatest pleasure, and the young lady concluded a very interesting performance without any further disturbance. A trifling episode this, but it has lingered in my memory more for the sake of little Nelson Keys, whom we all loved, than for the young lady he was befriending.

Admiral Jellicoe paid me the honour of a brief visit during one of those days of our sojourn on the yacht and paid me also the compliment of remembering how a year or two previously I had scored off his golf partner at Mont Agel. The Navy had been playing the residents and in the foursomes Jellicoe was partnered by Yarworth Jones, who was very much in evidence at Monte Carlo in those days. At the subsequent dinner, presided over in his usual delightful fashion by Walter de Frece, Yarworth Jones in alluding to his partner's golf (they had lost their

match) remarked, we thought a little unkindly, that from what he had seen of it he imagined the Admiral must have learnt his golf on a battleship. To which I—who happened to be the next speaker—retorted that if it were true that our distinguished visitor had learnt his golf on a battleship, it was certainly a remarkably good thing for all of us, and indeed for the whole of the civilised world, that he had not learnt his seamanship on the golf-links ! A somewhat obvious retort, perhaps, but we were full of wine—Walter de Frece had seen to that—and it went very well.

The Stavisky scandals were blazing their way through the Press of France about this time. I had seen the man at Cannes Casino—an imperturbable and pleasant gambler with very agreeable manners. Amongst the stories of his earlier life was one, that he had spent his honeymoon on a small motor yacht de luxe on which he had sailed over to Corsica. I bought my own boat—the *Echo*—in Marseilles from a mysterious agent who disappeared immediately afterwards and who had insisted upon cash almost before I had set foot on board. I never saw him again, but it occurred to me afterwards that he had refused to give me the name of the previous owner, and his explanation of the fact that the whole of the sleeping accommodation below was used for two large communicating cabins was that it had been built for the same purpose. My friends got hold of this story and I came in for a good deal of chaff. It has never been disproved and it may very likely have been the truth. Unlike most rumours which do no one any good, this one suggested to me an idea for a novel, which I promptly wrote and which has since been published in America under the title of *The Floating Peril* and in England as *The Bird of Paradise*.

I donned shore-going clothes more than once during that last summer at Garoupe and went over to Rex

Ingram's former studios near Nice to see my friend George Robey transformed into Sancho Panza. The idea of his being cast for the part at all was humorous enough, but his conception of it and his management of that immortal steed, which, by the by, was procured with the utmost difficulty, used to transport every one of the onlookers, professional or otherwise, into ecstasies of hilarity. All the same, I do not think that George Robey himself much enjoyed it. It was a dusty place. There was rain whenever they went up to Cansouls above Grasse, as they often did for the outdoor scenes, and the clothes he was forced to wear were very unsuitable for a Riviera summer. His reason for refusing a drink when he came into the Negresco one day, bathed in perspiration, was the most original I ever heard.

"I have only one mouth," he explained, "but I have a large body. A bath before anything!"

A wonderful man George! I thought so when last year I found him playing with subtlety and excellent effect the part of a millionaire French banker and threading his way with amazing skill through the devious intricacies of a *risqué* French farce in which every other sentence, from the British theatre-goer's point of view, was improper.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *The Swimmer in the Night*

YEARS ago, long before it had ever been suggested to me that I might write my own Memoirs, I used to think that this diligent searching of the cells of memory for anecdotes, however slight, concerning interesting people whom one had met, would be one of the easiest tasks in which a man could indulge. I know now that it is full of difficulties which never present themselves until one commences the effort. In the first place, one remembers the people but is liable to forget the framework—the environment in which they were met, the witty things they said—and remember only the effect they had upon one. Then again, however fortunate one has been, however many friendships and acquaintances have been made, however many interesting places have been visited, when you dwell upon that shadowy past you are bound to admit that there has been a reverse side to every memory in life. One can write with pleasure trifles about people who have left agreeable impressions behind, but life does not consist in meeting interesting strangers. There are so many dull grey patches when the days seem all alike, when nothing seems to happen and when the few people one does meet are of an unsympathetic type. What is the use of remembering meetings with famous people who took no interest in one and with whom you yourself failed to find the slightest affinity? "You must say something about So-and-so," quite a brilliant woman remarked to me the other day, speaking about a well-known personage with whom we both had some slight acquaintance. I admitted the obligation but I

deplored the necessity. The person in question had taken not the slightest interest in me—an attitude which had bred in me an exactly similar reaction. Of course she was clever—everyone said so—her books were striking, she made a sensation wherever she went, but to me there was nothing human about her. If you come to think of it honestly, half the possibilities of diving into the pool of memory are lost that way. How many hours we have wasted entertaining and being entertained by people who have inspired not a single feeling worthy of recording, whose outlook upon life has been utterly different, and whose departure into the realms of forgetfulness is always a relief. Of course, one is generally wrong, a great opportunity has probably been missed, but what is the use of an unsympathetic portrait? The fact of it is that a certain amount of genuine enthusiasm is necessary in any reproduction of life, artificial or personal, and without that enthusiasm the candle burns with a pale light.

Then there are the bad times through which one has passed. Who wants to drag them out again? Of what interest would it be to the most casual of readers to be asked to walk for a time in the unlit places? Worse almost than this is the terrible handicap of having always to tell the truth, or as near it as memory will allow. The small happenings and the great happenings, the pleasant sensations and the unpleasant ones of every day in one's life would seem so different if one could treat them as a photographer does his crude work and touch them up—a smile where the lips were fixed—a humorous speech where there had been silence—a kindly action which would have changed a whole situation but which was, alas, never thought of—a mildly heroic deed the possibility of which came so near and would have been so easy to describe, but which never developed. If one could only call to one's help one's imaginative gifts at certain times, when swinging the lamp of romance down the corridors of time, what a different result you could arrive at with pen and paper!

(I have never appreciated the joy of writing fiction so much as during the intervals between those days when I have sat down and striven to write of truthful happenings, to describe everything just as it really appeared.) Everything seems to miss its mark a little in the recording, and alas, revision is impossible. If one could only edit one's own life, avoid with deliberate care the pitfalls into which one has fallen, choose with the mature judgement which time alone can bring—the judgement of the epicurean—the fairest flowers and the most comely fashion of living, it would all be so much pleasanter and easier to write about. Worse than anything in this business of writing Memoirs is the ghost who walks by one's side—this grim and ever-present necessity of telling the truth, and the whole truth. Even the best hours one has spent, even the cleverest things one has said or done, could have been so much improved in the telling by just a touch of imagination. Here is one of the examples that occur to me of a lost story because its end can never be told.

During several evenings of the time I spent alone upon my small yacht, generally after my visitors—if there had been any—had dispersed and I was sitting on deck, I used to hear the threshing of the water which indicated the passing of some powerful swimmer. The first time I saw this intruder upon my solitude he was swimming upon his side with his face turned towards the boat. He smiled ever so slightly. I fancied that he might be an acquaintance, waved my hand and called out some greeting, but he continued his course, still heading for the open sea. I watched him until he turned and came back on the other side. As he went by for a second time I called out, inviting him to take a rest. Again that puzzling smile, a courteous shake of the head and he passed on. . . . I saw plenty of people during the next few days but the man's face remained in my memory. I made enquiries even on shore and of the boatmen. No one knew him. He drove down alone in a little car from somewhere in the hills



*Mr Opp.*



three or four times a week, changed in the car, swam out from the *plage* and disappeared again in the same fashion. I talked with the man who owned the little café on the beach. He shook his head and answered me mostly in gestures. I had a sudden inspiration.

" You do know who he is, Keller," I insisted. " Why don't you tell me ? "

The man was suddenly serious. His face was blank and I knew as he spoke that if ever a man was lying he was.

" *C'est un étranger. Je ne le connais pas, monsieur.*"

On the very last night, when we were preparing to move into Antibes for the winter, I heard once more through the twilight the sound of his coming and I saw his stalwart limbs cleaving their way through the sea close to the side of the boat. A slight east wind had sprung up and there were ghost-like flecks upon the waves. I leaned over the side and begged him to go no further. I saw then that he was actually already distressed and very nearly exhausted. With the help of my *mateLOT* we pulled him on board, wrapped him in a dressing-gown and gave him what he asked for—neat whisky. He bowed as he raised his glass and I recognised him. I scarcely knew what to say.

" We used to meet in Monte Carlo," I ventured.

The smile came back to his face. Perhaps he saw the surprise in mine.

" You believe that I have come back from the dead, monsieur," he said. " I am like one of the miraculous heroes of your own stories—yes ? "

" Well, I heard that you had fallen into trouble," I told him.

He drank more of the whisky. There were no half measures about it. In a few minutes he was a strong man again.

" I shall never die by drowning, monsieur," he assured me lightly. " I escaped that other death. It was a woman who saved me, but no one will ever know how."

"It was the woman who was always with you—very beautiful but very delicate?" I asked.

"It was she who saved me," he assented. "There were some who knew her name. There were, I fear, a few who knew mine."

"I did," I told him.

He brooded over that. Then he continued.

"I was tricked across the frontier," he confided, rising and throwing away the cigarette he had been smoking. "They did not take the trouble to try me. My name and record were sufficient, but she saved me, that woman."

"How?" I asked.

It was bad manners but it was instinct. I do not think that he even heard me. He stood up on deck and looked across towards the mountains. There was a flickering light half-way up one of the nearer slopes beyond Biot.

"We have a little farm there," he told me. "This is my only recreation. My companion is dying. We cannot go to Switzerland. She will not leave me. I shall not leave her. We are very happy. When the end comes, I too shall remove myself. It will be a great favour to an unfortunate man, sir, if you will forget this meeting, or perhaps," he added, as he threw off his borrowed dressing-gown, "as others have seen me on board, if you will forget my name."

I shook hands with him. I watched his dive—a perfect gesture. I have never seen him since. I consider that I have kept my word, for his name has never passed my lips. But oh, the handicaps of writing Memoirs. If only I could have told his story!

"Take my advice," Valentine Williams said to me some twenty-five years ago, "if any publisher or agent is ever misguided enough to suggest that you write your Memoirs, do it while you are still young, when the stuff

comes hot off your pen and everything that you write has the flavour of actual living."

Well, I had not the courage in those days, but he followed his own counsel and a very interesting volume he has turned out. With the exception of Noel Coward—who must have begun his in the cradle—he is the youngest man of my acquaintance who has ever tackled such a task with success. I tell myself as I plod on, however, that Valentine Williams has had many advantages. For one thing, he has been an accredited war correspondent, which I have never been, and he has come into contact with a great many people who have made history, which has not been my good fortune. The one lesser gift he possesses which defeats me is that sincere and joyous way of writing about himself without self-consciousness. If I ever attempted to tell a story in which the principal person concerned was myself, I should feel like a bashful curate in a country district entering a crowded drawing-room. I used to write sometimes in the first person and gave it up because I never seemed to find myself or to be thoroughly at ease until the last chapter. I have come back to it occasionally lately, in the Milan Grill Room series, for instance, but these are only short stories, and the atmosphere itself was so familiar that I felt perfectly at ease for once.

One of those dictators of manners and morals who flourished between the time of Dr. Johnson and William Hazlitt once said that shyness and self-consciousness were both distorted forms of conceit. I have grown to distrust that statement. Many people in the old days have, I know, found me stupid and difficult to talk to. I would have shaken their hands joyfully if they had told me so, for all my life I have been conscious of a certain form of mental paralysis which made its appearance in the company of both sympathetic and unsympathetic strangers with whom sometimes conversation, even in the smallest circles, has been a difficult task, almost a torture to me.

This has occurred to me sometimes, too, on occasions when everyone in the company was doing his best to be kindly and hospitable to a comparative stranger. It has happened to me more than once, for instance, during my visits to the United States, and even in England—one evening very soon after I was elected a member of the Garrick Club. I shared rooms at that time with Gerald Duckworth in Clarges Street and he was anxious that I should meet some of the principal members. I was invited to join what they called one of their talking seances in Lucas' rooms near Victoria Station. The other guests were Maurice Baring, Gerald Duckworth, A. E. W. Mason and E. V. Lucas himself. I was, to put it plainly, out of my class, and another of those same paralytic attacks kept me from even replying to the easiest openings which were made for me with kindly tact by everyone in turn. I said scarcely a word. The only distinct remembrance I brought away with me was hearing one of the quintette remark to the other as we broke up and I had momentarily disappeared in search of my hat—

"No wonder your pal writes such a damn lot, Gerald," he said to Duckworth, and left it at that. . . .

On our walk homewards my friend was a little more than ordinarily taciturn. The first remark he made was when we reached Clarges Street.

"A bit off colour tonight, weren't you, Opp?" he asked.

"Don't I know it!" I replied. "I can't help it. When I want to talk most I can't speak a word."

"Well, it's a good thing we did not have that little séance," Gerald remarked in his usual grumpy but not ill-natured fashion as we climbed the stairs to the flat, "before you came up for election."

I was never asked to one of those evenings again, but E. V. in later life became one of my best friends, and of Mason too I have many delightful memories of subsequent meetings. He even asked me to shoot with him and came

to visit me in a London hospital quite unexpectedly on one occasion when I was recovering from a somewhat serious operation. Maurice Baring I have never seen from that day to this. Of his conversation, brilliant though it was, I remember nothing. I remember him only because of a strange trick he had of striking a match on a bald spot of his finely shaped head !

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *Cricket de Luxe*

THERE came a time when our pleasant life at Cagnes-sur-Mer, consisting chiefly of work, golf and mild gambling, was rudely disturbed by sordid considerations. The franc, which had seemed fairly well established at about 125, and had indeed made sundry excited excursions into the neighbourhood of 180, was suddenly, by skilful finance on the part of its guardians and the departure of England from the gold standard, brought into the neighbourhood of 70. Perhaps there was a little homesickness about it too, but at any rate we sold the Villa Deveron and returned to England. The change of climate, however, was too abrupt. My wife, whose marvellous health has always been the subject of my wonder and admiration, remained undisturbed, but I myself seemed to catch cold about every month and developed a sort of bronchial catarrh which has never altogether left me. We tried various spots in England, but the doctors I consulted were one and all in favour of a warmer climate. Finally we decided to try Guernsey and I bought a house there rejoicing in the somewhat attractive name of "Le Vauquiedor."

Guernsey is a very pleasant but a very disappointing place. Its summer seems to be always on the point of coming and very seldom arrives. Its winters are indescribably cold and stormy. The first year we were there we packed up, took a small boat from London and migrated to the West Indies. We left England from a port I had never even heard of, much less visited, Avonmouth, in a Harrison Line steamer—a boat of moderate tonnage

but quite comfortable and not overcrowded. We were fortunate in finding upon the officers' staff an old friend, Colonel Pares, taking the place of the regular doctor who was away on leave. Colonel Pares was and still is, I am glad to say, a very interesting person. He did military service in the Blues and was full of anecdotes of his famous regiment. I had played a great deal of golf with him and I had also been fortunate in helping his daughter when she left the Slade School and started life on her own account as an illustrator. She has, I think, designed the jackets for nearly a hundred of my stories in England and America and she has a gift in this direction which I have never seen excelled amongst English artists—a gift for choosing the right incident in a story and grasping rapidly and easily the author's own ideas. She signs all her work "Bip Pares," and very distinctive work it is. Just now I see that she is doing maps for the *Daily Express*. Her work in this direction, too, seems very skilful, but not having seen her for some time I cannot understand what made her take it up.

Through Colonel Pares' interest I was given a privileged little spot on the captain's deck, protected from promenaders and casual visitors and, with my secretary, got through quite a lot of work before we came to the journey's end. I remember so well how suddenly the change of climate came upon us. One day we were shivering beneath extra rugs and wearing woolly scarves, the next day the swimming-pool was being filled, sun was pouring down upon us and the officers had all gone into white—a very delightful change.

We first visited Trinidad, where we had a pleasant time but were subjected to one mild disappointment. Noel Coward, whom I had come across in London a short time before sailing, spoke warmly of an island called Gasparee where he had rented a small bungalow and where he had written a play—*Point Valaine*—which was subsequently performed in New York. He spoke of the

delights of the place and the wonderful bathing. He had finished with the bungalow, he said, and, suggesting that I tried roughing it for a time, he handed me the key and a message to the old housekeeper who used to come down from the hotel to look after him.

A few days after our arrival at Port of Spain, we packed a luncheon basket, started off for Gasparé and, after a wonderful bathe, hired a motor-boat and went over to the island—my wife and secretary, two notebooks, two bathing costumes and other impedimenta. We first of all had lunch on the sands, a luncheon which was largely interfered with by millions of uninvited guests. Swarms of mosquitoes paid us undesired attentions, but the greatest trouble that we had was from the attractive but apparently half-starved small birds who descended upon us almost in flocks and with a touching confidence hopped about over our strip of tablecloth and invited themselves to share our impromptu meal, going even to the extreme of perching upon our hands and intercepting the food on its way to our mouths. It was a warm welcome but it had its drawbacks, and as soon as we had finished luncheon we packed up and went in search of the bungalow. We found it without difficulty, but from the first I am bound to say that it had a rather deserted appearance. We pushed open the door and found that the place seemed to have become the haunt of every description of flying insect, mostly with stings. The room had apparently been untouched since the departure of its distinguished occupant and the opening of the windows simply resulted in further invasions of winged creatures of all descriptions. We locked up again and departed in search of the hotel, but, alas, here lay the explanation of the deserted bungalow. The hotel had come to grief. Its proprietor, the old lady who had looked after the bungalows, everyone had gone. No one seemed left in the place but a stream of practically naked children who sucked sugar-cane and looked at us in dull and pensive wonder. Eventually we got hold of a genuine

inhabitant and he explained that Massa who owned the hotel had lost his money, the tenants had left the bungalows and the island had practically been taken over by the conquering mosquitoes and the charmingly plumaged but predatory birds with disagreeable habits. We took our notebooks and portfolio, posted the latchkey to Noel Coward and re-embarked for Port of Spain.

In Port of Spain we found nothing of particular interest except the climate, which drove us into a lighter form of sun-helmets and thinner linen clothes. The bathing was not particularly good and the novelty of accepting free cocktails from a charmingly mannered barman in the private establishment run by the firm who manufacture Angostura bitters soon wore off. The cocktails, however, were good and the small bottles of Angostura which were pressed upon us were a pleasant souvenir of several very attractive people.

The M.C.C. were playing cricket and I enjoyed a pleasant chat with my old friend Pat Hendren, but the fact of seeing a really good team defeated by a curiously composed eleven of all sizes and colours rather took our breath away. Still, we had not come to the West Indies to see cricket.

The hotel was comfortable and the people were kindly. Everyone was hospitably inclined—even the bank manager, who asked a few of the local notabilities to meet me at luncheon—a very pleasant function if one could have taken off one's clothes, left out the curry and ceased to perspire.

We visited the famous Pitch Lake in which the asphalt is so soft and yielding under the blazing tropical sun that we were told, with the utmost seriousness, of a horse and cart left unattended which disappeared one night in one of the danger-spots and were never seen or heard of again.

We passed on in due course to Barbados, Grenada and Santa Lucia, all delightful islands with a wonderful climate and really good bathing. In Grenada we were entertained

by a very charming young couple who had just inherited a coco-nut plantation of immense acreage and density—a dark forest of mystery into which we could only wander a few feet without running the risk of being bitten, stung or lost. We were given a truly native lunch, presided over by an English butler, served on a broad terrace which encircled the house and was rendered practically impregnable to mosquitoes and all forms of flying insects by a perfect system of fine netting. It was quite the most important estate we saw anything of until we visited Jamaica the following year, as besides the coco-nuts there were plantations of bananas, nutmeg and cocoa. The place itself had a strange and picturesque attraction, especially when the night wind came and the leaves of some of those seemingly immovable trees were turned backwards and the colours seemed to change at every moment, but my most poignant recollection of the whole place was the glorious combination of spicy odours which clung to one's garments for weeks afterwards.

We had a turbulent voyage home, landed at the West India Dock on a hideously cold day and at Guernsey towards the end of March in a snow-storm !

Whilst I am on the subject of the West Indies, I might say a word or two about our visit there in the following year. We chose to make our headquarters this time at Jamaica, where we stayed at the Constant Spring Hotel—a very delightful place with a first-class golf-links adjoining. Here my wife and I were fortunate enough to meet the lady champion of the West Indies—Mrs. Molly Pringle—with whom I had several games, at most of which I got soundly beaten. Nevertheless, it is a pleasant place in which to play golf. The caddies, as black as coal, are as interested in the game as their Scots prototypes. They discuss your play with the most disarming candour and, if it is only a stick of cane sugar, they have a bet upon every match at which they officiate. The layout of the course

is really quite good, but naturally the soil is as hard as iron and the distances one can reach sometimes are prodigious. The nineteenth hole is one of the best places of its sort I ever encountered. I have seen four cocktail-shakers at work behind the bar simultaneously, although the favourite drinks are either mint juleps or Planter's Punch. The latter is, I think, one of the finest six o'clock drinks I know, and I often told Sam, the head barman, that he would make a fortune anywhere in England if he came over and prepared them with his inimitable touch. He used to grin at me and shake his head.

"No find limes," he explained. "Gin no good without limes. English gentlemen not drink enough. Only serve six cocktails one gentleman. Not enough."

During my visit Lady Heathcoat-Amory—once our famous Joyce Wethered—accompanied by her husband, to whom she had recently been married, arrived at the hotel and played several matches with Mrs. Pringle. So far as I remember, two she won and the third she lost, but on each occasion Mrs. Pringle was able to give her a good game. That very popular young woman has a most delightfully easy swing, perfect control of her irons and a real golfing temperament. She was unfortunate enough to have to divorce her husband soon after our visit and is now, I think, in England looking after the education of her sons. I rather fancy that she has given up golf, but a few years ago she would have been a very difficult person to deal with in any of our championship meetings.

We were invited to sign our names at Government House and were promptly bidden to a very interesting luncheon, where we met, amongst other people, a great Swedish millionaire whose name has been in the newspapers a great deal lately, married to a very beautiful woman. They were travelling round the world in the former's yacht, which is supposed to be one of the most luxurious afloat. Major Rushbrook—the Governor's naval attaché—was a very charming and popular person of

whom we saw quite a good deal during the course of our visit. Sir Edward Denham, the Governor, and Lady Denham were a delightful couple and Sir Edward a thoroughly well-informed and intelligent man who took a great interest in his work. I had some idea of writing a story about certain phases of life in Jamaica whilst I was there, and Sir Edward was quite determined that I should understand some of the rather puzzling problems which the government of the island presented. He took me for a motor tour practically round the whole place. We visited sugar factories, banana plantations, coco-nut groves and the homes of most of the products, vegetable and mineral, for which Jamaica is famous. Sir Edward was greatly interested in the labour problems and the position of the coloured people, and some of his schemes seemed to me most interesting and carefully thought out. Unfortunately, two years after our visit I read to my great distress of his death. His loss, I am quite sure, was a severe one to the island, for I have never talked with anyone who was so interested in the problems of the people he had to look after, and I was looking forward with great pleasure to his promised visit as soon as he arrived in England.

Alas, in spite of that volume of interesting facts and statistics which he poured out upon me, I have to confess that my most poignant recollection of him is witnessing the final test match at Kingston between Yorkshire and the West Indies. I have watched a great many classic struggles in my time. I am still a member of Lords and the Oval, and there is no game I would sooner watch. This test match on the Kingston ground was, I think, the most dramatic. I will not bore my non-cricketing friends by anything in the shape of a long description, but it transpired that after luncheon on the last day the West Indies had piled up such a score that when their last wicket fell defeat seemed impossible. There was a very popular polo match being played the same afternoon in which the

whole of the Government House party with whom we were lunching were much interested. The idea had been that we were to go and see the finish of the test match, but as it seemed absolutely impossible that there could be any other finish except a draw to the match itself, everyone except Sir Edward and I decided to go to the polo. My host and I occupied the state box in solitary glory and I saw the most magnificent display of vigorous hitting I have ever seen. I have lost the card, unfortunately, but Mitchell of Yorkshire was the hero, and as the game drew towards its close he seemed to become possessed. When the first ball of the last over was bowled the score was about 174, with Yorkshire's weakest batsman at the other end, and I think it was Constantine's cousin, jet black, bowling wildly but at a terrific pace. His first delivery of that last over to Mitchell produced a perfectly hit late cut, which the fieldsman fumbled and which registered four. The batsman could have easily run five but Mitchell was not having any. He sat on his bat at the four and waited for the next ball, which he drove straight and easily for six. A rumble of voices all around the place. Everyone began adding up the score. Mitchell took up his stance again in the most leisurely fashion but with a dogged Yorkshire look in his face. He cut the next ball hard to the six boundary and the rumble all round the ground grew louder. Sixteen in three balls. The last over of the day arrived, Mitchell requiring eighteen for his century and also eighteen to win the match for Yorkshire, a task which had seemed an hour ago an utter impossibility. Well, he did it. I shall never be certain about that last ball—whether it was a four or a six which was needed for victory and his own hundred, but with the utmost sang-froid the ball was no sooner delivered at lightning speed than he stepped out of his ground and banged it well into the private motor-car enclosure, from which, so far as I know, it was never retrieved. Yorkshire won by two and Mitchell achieved his century.

The rumble became a roar and the tumult was almost deafening when Mitchell was escorted by the local captain and the secretary to where we were seated. The Governor shook him by one hand—I took the other. What else passed between us does not matter. It was the greatest feat I have ever seen in cricket history.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *Opera from the Sycamore Tree*

MY third and probably my happiest winter visit to Jamaica occurred during the next winter after a sloppy and hopelessly wet summer spent in Guernsey.

No noisy and meticulously smart hotel this time. With advancing age comes experience, and both my wife and I were well on in the sixties then, although we did our best to ignore the fact. I really believe that it has never occurred to either of us to count the years. Once when it became necessary for us to arrive at the exact age for purposes of purchasing an annuity we had to refer back to our marriage certificate.

I, much the vainer and more self-conscious of the two, sometimes worry about the falling curtain. My wife never does. As a matter of fact I don't think that she believes it. I remember her coming into the gardens in Jamaica where I was sitting one golden afternoon, swinging her mallet after a victorious round at golf croquet and demanding a Planter's Punch. My companion, an old school friend of hers, looked at her curiously :

"Elsie!" she exclaimed, "you are a disgrace. Bathing this morning, tennis after lunch, and now golf croquet. Do you realise that you are the same age as I am, sixty — ?"

My better half shrugged her shoulders :

"I am never tired, so why should I worry?" she replied. "I never think about age. I suppose that is really the secret of keeping young. Never think about disagreeable things. Never rebel against inevitability. Let the wrinkles come if they will. Don't see them."

Elizabeth Arden and a flattering mirror are the most important things in life."

Certainly that has always been my wife's scheme of philosophy. Only with her there has never been any deliberate effort. She has a natural gift for evading all the disagreeable channels of thought. She has no apprehensions of evil. Having an entirely different nervous outlook, I envy her. No good. She was born to smile at life and I to scowl at it. She moves light-footed towards the twilight. I watch for the goblins.

Jamaica is very beautiful. This time we were sensible enough to cut out the fashionable hotel and bathing-place on the north side of the island and settled down at the Shaw Park Estate, a large country-house once the residence of the Pringle family. We had lovely rooms with huge balconies and magnificent views, excellent homely cooking, a pleasant *entourage* of native servants and a few guests. The proprietress was a descendant of a well-known local family, and she and her husband, Colonel Stewart, a retired officer once in the Blues, did their best to make all their visitors comfortable without any attempt to intrude upon their privacy. I dislike being fussed over as a rule at an hotel with this sort of régime, but the Stewarts are certainly full of tact and most pleasant people. He is a good tennis, golf and bridge player, while his wife is an excellent housekeeper. I have heard nothing of them for some years, but I hope that Shaw Park is still the same smiling paradise that I remember so well.

There were drawbacks, of course, to the place. Curiously situated on the highest shelf of a range of hills overlooking the sea, bathing is a most unpractical proposition. It means a motor drive of about four miles down a wild mountain road twisting and turning with the slightest provocation and bordered with hedges of brilliantly coloured poinsettia. Then follows a drive through a native village where the girls and women and even the children seem

to vie with one another in the brilliancy and scantiness of their clothing, and finally a finish on a wild piece of land leading on to the deep yellow sands. Here a small circle of rudely fashioned huts had been knocked together whose dried-grass sides offered the least amount of protection the modern man or woman could conceive. We were solemnly presented on our arrival at the hotel with a very modern key which gave us the exclusive rights to one of these edifices, but a spirit of communism seemed to exist amongst the bathers and everyone helped himself on his or her arrival to the best situated or largest shelter.

There is no restaurant or cocktail bar or any of the modern adjuncts of civilisation existing here, but the woods on either side, consisting chiefly of umbrella pines, banana trees and a coco-nut grove, afford deep and pleasant shade. There are many recesses for picnics or an alfresco nap.

The bathing itself is wonderful, the water is as clear as crystal and as blue as the skies. It has that magnetic salty odour always found at its best in tropical countries.

There is a barbaric element about the place hard to explain, but it is supposed to be the private property of the hotel, and certainly its solitude is a very attractive feature.

One day a party of very cheerful Americans lurching at the hotel came over and introduced themselves. They knew connections of my wife's and claimed to be on friendly terms with my American publishers. The hostess, a very charming lady, invited us all over to a picnic lunch and bathe on the private beach of her own estate about five miles away. We accepted with pleasure and spent a most enjoyable day notwithstanding a few grim moments at the termination of our morning bathe. Drying ourselves on the sands, a very casual and most unnecessary performance, I pointed out to our hostess one of her servants in the white linen livery of the house who was standing on the edge of a ridge about a hundred yards out at sea :

"Isn't that one of your men?" I asked her. "What is he doing out there?"

"He is looking out for sharks," she confided.

"Sharks?" I repeated thoughtfully. "Do they come as near as that?"

She nodded. "Yes, they even come up to the ridge," she admitted, "and there are two or three places where they can get through. That is why we always have a man there with a whistle when we have guests. I ought to have told you before."

"On the whole, I am glad you did not," I assured her. "Those natives seem to be taking something of a risk," I added, pointing to a spot where the ridge opened up a little on the other side of the custodian.

She smiled.

"They are all right here," she told me. "The sharks never touch a native so long as there are white people about."

I accepted the butler's offer of another Planter's Punch from an immense shaker. A well-made Planter's Punch is a most delectable beverage and a great steadier of the nerves.

My hostess laughed at me.

"I believe you are afraid of sharks," she said.

"I am," I confessed.

We sat down presently to a plain but delicious luncheon consisting chiefly of huge dishes of the native pineapples and bananas, with steaming platters of fish just caught from the bay and garnished with strange aromatic leaves and roots. There was no wine but any quantity of Planter's Punches, rum cocktails and Scotch whisky.

Afterwards, at a signal from our hostess, coffee was served and a little later on we entered upon the most interesting portion of the day.

The servants, at a word from their mistress, stepped out of their liveries as though by magic and in the scantiest

of bathing clothes clambered up into the spreading boughs of what seemed to be an old sycamore tree.

Here they distributed themselves in strange fashion : a lusty youth with an impish grin upon his face sat on one of the lower branches, a lad who had the figure almost of a girl, with large eyes and delicate limbs, half concealed above him amongst the leaves, and the remainder of the men almost hidden to sight.

"An orchestra!" my wife exclaimed as the man nearest to us produced a roughly fashioned wooden instrument, struck a note and was answered from the youth above.

Our hostess smiled.

"Quite right," she declared. "This is my own private orchestra. They will sing you something, but the sounds they make could never be reproduced upon any instrument you have ever seen or heard of."

There was action as well as music in the strange performance that followed.

Horatio, which we were told was the name of the man on the lowest bough, turned to us and waved his instrument :

"We make the melody for the great play," he told us.  
"It is *Romeo and Juliet*."

There was a little murmur amongst the leaves almost as though they were shivering before a coming storm. Then followed the strangest of music. Music it indubitably was. Never a discord, sometimes a wail, sometimes under-notes, full of vibrant passion. Horatio, after his four-lined verse had finished, climbed a little higher up the tree. Juliet laughed down at him and moved a little further from his reach. He sang again. The words were something like this :

"Just one step more—"

"I enter your door—"

"One little step higher—"

"No, no," from Juliet.

Horatio blew softly into his instrument, maintaining a firm grip upon the trunk of the tree.

"If you fly to the moon," he sang,

"I shall come very soon," Juliet responded.

There was more of this doggerel, as I suppose one must call it, but the voices of both and the dull chorus with which they were surrounded, were music, sweet haunting music.

Juliet climbed higher. The boy sprinkled leaves in the face of Horatio but he feigned terror. He leaned down. He held out his hand for a moment as though in encouragement, only to withdraw it, shivering.

"I throw myself down," Juliet wailed.

"My arms will hold you," Horatio replied.

"I am afraid."

Horatio laughed.

He turned round as though for our applause. He was within a foot or two of his destination.

We were all breathless. Not one of us moved or spoke.

Horatio stretched out his hand and reached the small foot which was dangling above him. The lad's cry sobbed out.

Our hostess rose to her feet :

"Horatio," she cried reprovingly, "not that last verse. Remember, I forbid it."

Horatio looked down at us all as though for sympathy. He flung his instrument to the ground and disappeared in the leaves. Our hostess told us afterwards that he was indulging in a fit of temper.

The chorus went on. We shouted our applause.

A moment later the musicians were descending the tree like a troop of monkeys.

"Now," our hostess told them, "you may ask Joseph for a jug of coco-nut wine and go and have your bathe."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *The Great Centenary*

IT was, I believe, the morning after the picnic bathing lunch with our neighbours that I received a card of invitation to the dinner in Boston which was to be the source of so much joy and satisfaction to me, not only at the time but throughout these my later years. Messrs. Little, Brown and Company, Publishers, of Beacon Street, Boston, Mass., U.S.A., invited Mr. E. Phillips Oppenheim to attend a dinner at a date some three weeks ahead to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the founding of their house !

Alfred McIntyre and his wife had come to Jamaica in January for a holiday and had spent a few days with us at Shaw Park. He had told me of the plans for this dinner and had begged me to come, but I had demurred, first, because this meant finishing my holiday ten days before I had intended ; and secondly, because I had my passage engaged from Kingston to England and wondered whether I could secure satisfactory accommodation on a boat from New York in April in view of the expected rush of Americans to England then to take in the coronation of George VI. But Alfred pointed out that Little, Brown and Company had been publishing my books for thirty-four years and had just issued my one hundred and first novel, and I had promised to come if I possibly could. So by the time the invitation arrived in March, my secretary—Miss Symes in those days—had procured for me passage to New York on the United Fruit Company's boat. My agent in New York had secured cabins for me on the *Britannic* from New York early in April. So I

despatched an enthusiastic acceptance of the invitation.

Yet, when the time came, I was not altogether happy on leaving Jamaica. I had become much attached, as had my wife, to the simple life at Shaw Park, the glorious mass of colouring by which we were surrounded, the lurid but magnificent sunrises and sunsets, the curious but aromatic herbal odours with which the heavy air seemed always saturated, the soft sibilant murmur of the native servants—an intonation more soothing than any other in the world. Nevertheless, we packed everything into the car we had hired for the two months of our stay and early one morning we took our sorrowful leave of a very beautiful spot. We stayed the night at Kingston at the very fine hotel run strictly on modern American lines where the Dry Martini ousted the Planter's Punch of the interior and in its way was rather a pleasant change. In the grounds of the hotel within a few feet of the sea is the most saline swimming-pool I have ever entered. The odour of the sea is marvellous and it is never quiet. The slightest wind and it develops a tempest which sends clouds of spray flying over the dressing-rooms and waves which lift the idle floater over the side of the bath if he is not careful. Everyone bathes here in the cool of the evening before dinner.

We were given a dinner of departure by our very good friends the de Cordovas—he the editor of the local newspaper *The Gleaner*, and she “a lady of many charities,” as the Governor himself called her. She was the moving spirit in the chief hospital of the place, also any institution to do with children. Incidentally she was a very charming and good-looking woman whom later on we were delighted to meet in London. We hoped to have seen more of her there but she preferred Paris.

We were pleased to meet some old friends—Ben Travers and his wife—and also the Sax Rohmers, the latter on his way to Haiti to attend a secret function of an occult race who were reputed to sacrifice human children

to their mystical but pagan god and who punished by death any intruder who ventured in upon their most secret rite of all. I heard His Excellency, when asked his advice about a proposed visit there, reply curtly that it would be advisable to keep away from the island during that particular week. The few natives there honestly believe that their High Priest, until the spell of the ceremony is over, really possesses the inspiration of a god and has power over all good and evil spirits who obey his commands blindly. I met Sax Rohmer a year or so later and asked him about that visit. Curiously enough he had nothing to say and professed to have forgotten the incident. Perhaps he is writing a book about it ! Or perhaps his experiences were so lurid that he is determined to forget all about them.

There were other pleasant people at that dinner, as was usually the case at the de Cordovas, but I remember it chiefly because it was the last time I met Sir Edward, his untimely death occurring only a short time later. Alas, he missed the knowledge which would have made a happy man of him—that the Government, after long delays, really have tackled the labour question in Jamaica and placed the languishing industries of the island on a sounder basis. The tardily organised Commission pronounced without hesitation in favour of the late Governor's scheme, and I believe the island is now on the way to recover its former prosperity. We had a few last words on the subject sitting out in the garden after dinner in a rather scattered but pleasant circle, the cigar and cigarette lights, the evening dress and uniforms of the men—two or three of the Governor's staff—mingling with the gayer toilettes of the women in a curiously attractive *ensemble*. We finished the evening at the one and only night club in the city. The place was crowded, but the most attractive thing about it was the music. The audience was largely composed of tourists, and for propriety of behaviour and sedateness of mien they might

have been dancing on the deck of their round-the-world steamer.

Our voyage up to New York was uneventful, a pleasant but rather monotonous succession of games of shuffleboard, attempts at work which, as the boat was small and noisy, were not always successful, and the whole of one afternoon taken up by composing the formal skeleton of the discourse which I was preparing for the festival night.

We were met in New York by several old friends—including Mrs. Mitchell and her daughter Ann, who were chiefly responsible for my wife's sudden trip round the world many years before. The latter had sent us a radiogram asking us to dine with them, and we joined a very pleasant crowd at Sherry's. We arrived there a little worn-out, as from the moment of our taking up our rooms at the hotel until the hour for changing for dinner I was occupied by receiving a constant stream of photographers, interviewers and journalists. In the States, as I had found out on a previous visit, one's literary agent, in his own and your interests, of course, goes about trying to stir up publicity for overseas visitors. Perhaps the circumstances of my visit made the occasion a little more interesting. My wife and I were photographed in every conceivable place from the roof garden of the hotel to the entrance lounge, and we were also very pleasantly interviewed by a number of highly intelligent young men and women whose persistence and amiability were little short of amazing. In the end we had to put off a good many until my return from Boston, which would be in about a week's time. I explained that I should then have much more to tell them and made my peace as well as I could with the small crowd of rush men whom I had come across before and who seemed to want to get one's life-history in tabloid form in something less than five minutes in time for insertion in their last edition. The fact of my dinner engagement, an early one because

we were taken to a theatre afterwards, provoked only a smile from the restless little group, and in the end I had to leave my very capable secretary to deal with some late arrivals and take my cocktail in the bathroom, to which one particularly assiduous young gentleman resolutely followed me. My wife, who had made her excuses at least an hour earlier, was engaged with another small group of late arrivals when I descended, and we made our escape from the hotel by the back premises.

We spent the next two days in New York, as my agent had made a good many business appointments for me, and on Sunday took the noon train to Boston. Our arrival there had a good home-coming flavour about it that New York could never offer. If as a younger man I had taken up my residence in the States I should have always chosen a part where Boston was my capital city. My wife had a small crowd of relatives to meet her and I had my dear friend, Alfred McIntyre, whose cheerful smile in any country is always a welcome sight. He had engaged a suite for us at the Ritz-Carlton, which is one of the most comfortable hotels I have ever stayed in, and there I was interviewed and photographed for an hour, and later went to the McIntyres' with my wife and her sister and Miss Symes for a quiet meal and talk of old times.

During the next three days I was kept busy by luncheons, dinners and cocktail parties and had a very interesting ride in a police radio car. When I come to think it over, I do not believe that there was a single disappointing feature in this visit of mine. I met many old friends and a great many others whom I should have been very content to welcome as new ones. I enjoyed seeing again William Dana Orcutt, who many years ago had given me the first party I had attended in Boston. He looked scarcely a day older than when he had written *In Quest of the Perfect Book*. The McIntyres' friends, however, consisted chiefly

of the younger generation. Leaving once more after a luncheon party, the delightful old square in which they lived, we were conscious again of that extraordinary likeness to Edinburgh which so many people have remarked upon in writing or talking of Boston. Louisburg Square with its fringe of fine old elm trees was far from suggesting anything of the new world. It has the sort of peaceful atmosphere which Carlyle and Stevenson wrote about so eloquently in their younger days, a suitable dwelling-place for any man who loved books and quietness, with faint whisperings now and then of the stir of a great city.

I enjoyed particularly a small luncheon given for me at the Somerset Club, at which my host was Roger Scaife. The oldest friend I had in Boston, Dr. Homer Gage, for whom I had always had a great affection, had put off a journey to New York to be present, and sat on my right hand. His unexpected death a year or so later was a great loss. He had been a famous football player in his youth, one of the finest surgeons in the United States during his middle age and a successful financier and man of affairs during his later years. I never quite understood his taking over the great manufacturing concern from which his wife's income was derived upon her father's death, but he was already upon the Board, he already possessed the confidence of everyone connected with the affair, and his wife wished it. His wife was a very charming person and everything she wished for in life she generally got.

I dwell a little upon my friend perhaps because there have been few men whom I have met in life so obviously capable of filling a great place in any possible situation. He was not an enthusiastic politician, but he would have made, I am sure, an excellent President. He was rather slow in speech, deliberate but unerring in his judgements and full of that Christian kindness of disposition which seems sometimes to radiate in an entirely effortless way from men of high ideals and a gentle form of life.

He could be severe at times, but I never heard him speak ill of anyone.

When he had to make decisions and adjudicate upon the important problems which a complex world, even in those days, was beginning to force upon every man distinguished from his fellows, he seldom made a mistake. In no country which I have ever visited have I met with a man revered to such an extent. With it all, his gay and somewhat frivolous wife adored him, and in the many years of our friendship I never heard a single person who had a word to say against him.

His little after-luncheon speech on this present occasion was just perfect. The kindly smile never left his lips. He must have had hundreds of friends and admirers nearer and dearer to him than I was whom he was continually meeting, but he knew just the things to say and said them gracefully and pleasantly.

It was one of my happiest memories that luncheon, and to have been patted on the back in the morning was a very excellent prelude to a somewhat nervous ordeal at night. I was to speak at the Centenary Dinner, I had my notes prepared, and I was wishing that part of the evening's programme were over and done with.

A few more hours and the great night had really arrived. My dress suit, for which I had cabled, had arrived from London in time, and in a secret pocket I had the notes for my speech. We were spared a formal reception, which is always a tedious affair at a function of this sort, but there was a sufficiently lengthy cocktail period. By some sort of prior arrangement, I suppose, the majority of the invited guests were already in their places when we entered the banquet-room and made our way to the head table. It was all very much like the many celebrations of the sort one attends in the course of a London season. The guests were mostly authors, artists, critics, booksellers and publishers, and in many cases their wives or husbands. It might indeed have been an annual

dinner of the Royal Literary Fund in London or one of those other festivals which make their customary demands upon our pockets and our digestion. Only this time the personal note was there. In an hour or so I should be on my feet trying to interest the crowd of men and women in my own personal connection with the proceedings, and never before had it seemed so insignificant. What right had I there by the side of the chairman anyway? More than a hundred books. Why, most of the people there seemed quite capable of having written a thousand. There was Val Williams smiling. It did me good to see a familiar face anyway. He would have written more than a hundred, I was sure, when he was my age. Then a little voice of memory whispered to me, "Yes, but not so many published by the same firm."

I felt reassured. It was an achievement that. A remarkable feat of endurance on the part of the publishers or a triumph of pertinacity on the part of the author. . . .

"You are second on the list of speakers," Alfred remarked to cheer me up.

"The sooner the better," I agreed. "Tell me who some of the people are."

Then we were off. The ice was broken. I had heard my own voice and it sounded all right. I was introduced to a gorgeously beautiful young lady two places to Alfred's left, and by some delightful chance I had read her latest novel and enjoyed it. I recognised another dear friend not very far away—Mrs. Melloney, whose journey from New York that day to attend the dinner was the greatest compliment I was paid and the one I valued most during the whole evening. She has, I consider, the most beautifully spiritual face of any woman of her age I have ever seen, the figure of a girl, the poise of a duchess and eyes which creep into one's sense of living in some disturbing way. I shall never forget my astonishment when some few days later she introduced to me her grown-up son.

I was now settling down to take more careful note of my surroundings. At a round table in front of ours, indeed almost touching it, I saw Dana Orcutt, and Alfred's wife, Helen, from whom I received a carefully treasured encouraging smile now and then.

Very early in the proceedings we were made aware of a feature common enough, I believe, at public dinners in the States but entirely new to me and the handful of Britishers who were present. This was a functionary of distinction who sat at the head table and was a sort of free-lance, announcing the speakers in their turn but springing up without any previous intimation and letting off a number of what our friends on the other side call wisecracks, which were apparently a great success with the audience but simply bewildering to us, except that they nearly all referred to Mark Twain. In the intervals between these staccato fire-bursts of eloquence, Alfred explained to us what it was all about. It seems that Mark Twain had once visited Boston and for some reason or other had not been altogether satisfied with his reception. He therefore wrote a few things about the city which did not go very well with the present company, and our friend the wandering toast-master, on behalf of all good Bostonians, was getting a little of their own back on him. All very well in its way, but what on earth had it to do with Little Brown's anniversary dinner or my one hundred and first novel ?

Apart from the fact that I hated him like poison, all my sympathies were with the toast-master, for the only time that I had ever met Mark Twain was during his last visit to England, when he was admittedly a little past the zenith of his career as a humorist. It was a cold November night and he came to the Savage Club for dinner in a white flannel suit and a flowing white silk tie. He said little to remind us of the books we had all loved and of which he was the author, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *A Tramp Abroad*.

And then with what a throb of relief I realised that our toast-master was approaching the end of his tether. He deliberately paused in his smooth gabble of reminiscence, glanced at his notes, and introduced the first speaker. And in a few minutes he was introducing me and asking me to be the guest to propose the health of Little, Brown and Company.

I felt in my pockets for my notes and let them slip again through my fingers. I looked round the crowded room, and the faces, which a short time ago had seemed like the faces of strangers, seemed suddenly to become familiar. I felt that I was being greeted by friends, and the applause, which continued for some few moments, was a genuine expression of a genuine welcome. In those few moments I rebuilt my speech. I never once took my notes from my pocket. I let my thoughts wander back to the day of my first visit to the firm. I was shaking hands with Mr. James McIntyre, the father of the comparatively young man seated by my side who had achieved the proud position of being the head of one of the most distinguished publishing houses in America. That was the chief fact which I had to keep in mind.

I was there not to give dull facts but to outline the firm's progress during all these years so far as my personal contacts with it were concerned. It seemed so easy. My visits to Boston, and then the visits of Herbert Jenkins to England. The growth of my friendship with Alfred after his first visit to Europe, his initiation at Monte Carlo, our pleasant days upon the Riviera, our long talks about books and the making of books.

So my speech flowed on. I told my audience how delighted we all were the first time Alfred McIntyre brought his wife to Europe with him and how his son, whom I saw up in the gallery, had made a great impression upon all our friends. He took command of my small motor yacht at Guernsey and was known as the "young

Captain." Afterwards my navigator often used to ask me when the young gentleman from the other side of the Atlantic was coming again.

I was able to say a few of the pleasant things that I had always felt for the firm, and I was able to dilate upon the greater pleasure one felt when working for a firm whose sympathies had always been so acute and vital. It is still a joy to me to feel—as I still feel and felt that night—that it is a wonderful connection to have, the connection between an author and a publisher with whom there has never been a single word of disagreement.

Well, my speech came to an end.

I felt, as I sat down, that it was one of the happiest moments of my life, and I felt, as I stood up again a few moments later, that it was also one of the thirstiest.

A New York publisher, speaking for twenty or so others, was handing Alfred a silver bowl as large as a baby's cradle and the wine waiter was emptying champagne into it as fast as he could. Alfred was forced to take the first drink, but I had the second, and nothing ever tasted better. I wiped my lips with the beautifully embroidered napkin passed through the handle and finally resumed my seat a happy man.

The beautiful young lady made, as one expected, a very delightful speech and then there were others. It was after midnight when the meeting drew towards an end. There was a great deal of hand-shaking and many kind speeches in the lobby of the hotel and a shower of invitations, for Boston is a very hospitable city.

After that we spent a delightful hour up at the McIntyres' house at Louisburg Square, and the only other thing I remember distinctly about the close of the evening is that it was snowing slightly when we left and that, when we stepped into the McIntyre limousine, although Louisburg Square is without doubt a square, we seemed to be driving in a circle until we stopped in front of the doors of the Ritz-Carlton.

The next day I learned that the toast-master had wanted to have this dinner last later than one once given in New York in honour of Mark Twain, which I think I was told went on till two or three in the morning. Perhaps this explains why he talked so much about him.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *A happy Month in London*

WE left Boston, my wife, Miss Symes and myself, two or three days after the great function, and made our way back to New York, where our first business was to secure passages for England. My wife at the last moment decided to stay on a week or two in Boston with her many friends and relations there, and she accompanied us to New York with the purpose only of seeing me off to Southampton.

We spent a few days in the city, paying visits, one of the most interesting of which I have always remembered because it is my conviction that I was seated between the two cleverest women I have ever met in any country of the world. One was, of course, my hostess, Mrs. Melloney, and the other Miss Dorothy Thompson, the wife of Sinclair Lewis, who was known in those days as an exceptionally brilliant journalist and who has since increased her reputation as a writer on political and economic subjects. Our conversation *à trois* was intensely interesting to me, but I was obliged to confess at the outset, as I have been compelled to do on more than one occasion, that a story-writer pure and simple, which is all I have ever claimed to be, is generally an ignorant person so far as regards the great economic questions of the day, and is also a little slow with his tongue in the art of repartee. My companions, however, very charmingly adapted their conversation to my level, although I fancy that Miss Thompson was a little disappointed to find that I had never had the energy to penetrate into the new Russia and to study her problems, or to adopt a more H. G. Wells-like outlook upon life in

general. I think that she must have forgiven me, however, because she came to a cocktail party which we gave on the eve of my departure for England, and although she must have found herself in queer company from the purely intellectual point of view, she found one or two of her old friends amongst the later arrivals—Mary Roberts Rinehart, for example, with whom she carried on a spirited conversation. Of the latter I saw far too little during my brief visit, but I was delighted to find the charm of her books so faithfully reproduced in her most attractive personality.

Looking backwards, I realise more now than perhaps I did at the time what a curious but pleasant assortment of personalities paid me the compliment of coming to the cocktail party that afternoon. Games and athletics were represented by the young Van der Poels, golfers, stockbrokers and young men about town, equally at home on the squash-racket courts as they had been during their younger days on the polo ground. Charm and society were there represented by the widow of my dear friend Julian Ullman, a Barclay before her first marriage and now the wife of an American soldier of distinction, General Kilbreth. A charming American woman, also, the Duchess of Oporto, the widow of the uncle of King Manoel, who had once or twice stayed with us on the Riviera, had heard that we were at the hotel and offered herself as a willing guest. The stage was represented by Lady Dudley, Gertie Miller of my younger days. It was delightful to see her again, and she seemed to have preserved in amazing fashion every one of those kindly gifts of speech and person which had made her such a favourite in the past. She was also staying at the hotel and brought with her some golfing friends, one of whom was the present Mrs. Philip Hill. In the literary world the two ladies whom I have already mentioned were our star turns. There was also Valentine Williams, Littauer, one of the editors of *Collier's*, and also Bob Davis, a late but welcome arrival.

Bob Davis I have always been delighted to see. In my younger days he typified America to me. His informality, his "shirt-sleeve manner," as he himself called it, his point-blank vigour of conversation, were all refreshing to the Englishman. He dug me out when I was paying one of my earlier visits to the Riviera. I was at Hyères at the time, and he walked up to me on the golf course and introduced himself in his usual breezy fashion. I was playing rather a close match with a testy old Colonel of my acquaintance who was also a punctilious golfer and who had the shock of his life when Davis, after explaining the reason of his visit, offered to finish the round with us, and did so, playing with my clubs and throwing his coat over to my caddie to carry. Fortunately my companion saw the humorous side of the situation and Bob Davis' suggestion of a dollar a hole appealed to him immensely. Our visitor was quite a considerable amount of money out of pocket when we had finished the round, but he was streaming with perspiration and brimful of smiles. He paid up with glorious alacrity and marched us both off to the bar. Our choice of drinks, however, distressed him greatly.

"Say, what's that you're talking about?" he demanded. "Tea! What do you do with it!"

"Perhaps you'd like a whisky and soda," I suggested.

"Say, boy, now you're talking," he replied. "You two play about the finest golf I've ever seen. I couldn't remember it on tea. I don't suppose you know what a cocktail is," he went on, as he handled the tumbler with the skill of long habit.

"Never heard of it," my companion declared.

"I have," I replied, having not long ago returned from my visit to the States. "I had two at the Boston Country Club. They don't know anything about them over here, I'm afraid."

"Then I'll teach you fellows something," Bob Davis

declared, reaching out for his second whisky and soda. "I've come down here to buy a serial story off you for *Munsey's Magazine*, and whether I pull it off or not, I'll show the whole hotel here what American cocktails are like, if you give me half an hour before dinner, plenty of ice, and all the dry gin and French vermouth I need. I shall feel then that I haven't come all this way for nothing, anyhow."

Bob was as good as his word, too. How he managed it I don't know, but up at the hotel that evening, behind the bar, there he was in shirt-sleeves, squeezing lemons, stirring huge tumblers, juggling with them and stirring their contents, smiling and joking with everybody, although they were all perfect strangers to him, and sending the stupefied waiters away every few minutes with trayfuls of cocktails, for all of which (I can answer for it) he religiously paid. It was such a maelstrom of alcohol as the Golfe Hôtel at Hyères had never known, the gayest company at dinner, and Bob Davis the most popular guest who had ever entered the place. Incidentally, he bought my next serial for *Munsey's Magazine* for more money than I had ever hitherto received for a serial in my life. It was called *The Hillman*, and the volume, I think, still has some small sale.

Whilst I'm on the subject of serials, I should like to retrace my steps a little. Several years before the sale of *The Hillman* to Bob Davis for *Munsey's*, I had had another very interesting conversation with an American editor, Mr. Chamberlain, who was editor-in-chief of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, Hearst's famous periodical. He came to me on the subject of serial work just at the time when publishers were rather divided in opinion as to whether the prior publication of the story in a magazine affected its value when presented in volume form. I know that at that time the prevailing opinion amongst one or two of the old firms of publishers was that they preferred to issue a story in its virginal form, that is to say, that they

objected to its prior appearance in any form of piecemeal publication. Their idea was, and I believe at the time it was one shared by the directors of Little, Brown and Company, that the tempting offers that magazine editors were beginning to make for work of a certain type "to be continued in our next issue" were apt to develop a staccato style of writing, especially amongst young writers, and that instead of the novel having one tremendous climax, the author was inclined to spread out his effects instead of concentrating them. It was during this conversation with Chamberlain that I developed an idea which I have used now for nearly thirty years with considerable success. I told him I was having a great many offers for short stories which rather interfered with my novels, and I suggested that I write some short stories all having to do with the same people, or having, at any rate, the same hero or heroine. He thought well of the idea and we discussed it thoroughly. Quite late that night he rang me up and asked if he could come round and see me. We met, I think it was at the Savage Club. He told me that he had been considering my idea all evening and had become exceedingly enthusiastic about it, and I signed that night an agreement to write ten short stories instead of selling him my next novel for serial publication. The short stories were to have the same hero and to be linked together so far as possible.

This was over thirty years ago, and since then the whole of my short-story fiction, with the exception of perhaps a dozen stories for the *Strand* and a few special commissions, has been written in this form. The advantage to an author is apparent, for when the ten or twelve stories have run their course through a magazine or periodical, they can then be issued as a volume. Publishers have always fought shy of volumes of short stories, but it became quite a different thing when these short stories were all connected and the same hero appeared in each. My first experiment with the stories I wrote for

Chamberlain appeared under the title of *The Long Arm of Mannister*, which was quickly followed by another series entitled *The Chanay Syndicate*, *Jacob's Ladder* and many others. Perhaps the most successful of all these was one entitled *The Adventures of Mr. Ernest Bliss*, which has appeared translated into many languages in many different countries and not long ago was making its appearance as a serial in a South of France daily.

I was, so far as I know, the first amongst English authors, at any rate, to adopt this system of writing short stories, but almost at the same time, it might even have been in the same year, that greatest of all masters in the art of writing short stories, Conan Doyle, published his first "Sherlock Holmes" and he, of course, proceeded on the same lines throughout the rest of his days. I remember at our first meeting his interrupting a cricket match of no particular importance, except that it took place at Lord's, to discuss with me the question of exact dates, but as detail was always his strong point and one of my weakest, I avoided even the best-natured of arguments. He was a mighty hitter in those days, and although I saw very little of his cricket we often played golf together later in life at Sheringham. Except for Plum Wodehouse, he was the longest driver amongst the ordinary golf amateurs I have ever seen. In his cricket outfit he was a fine figure of a man, too, his white flannel shirt always open and his trousers unusually baggy. My cricket experiences have been more as a spectator than a player, but I can only remember two men, C. E. de Trafford, a Leicestershire captain in my younger days, and Bonner, the Australian, who could hit a cricket ball further.

I am losing continuity, as my wife, who has spent a good deal more time than usual in my study since I have begun to write these memoirs, would say. She is quite right and I shall return to the narrow path. One does feel inclined to wander off at times, as a dear woman friend of mine, indulging in this same task, once remarked

to me hopelessly. I return, therefore, to New York, to the crowded docks on the afternoon after the cocktail party, to the farewells I exchanged with many old friends and to the delightful offerings of flowers and books which so many of them brought—a pleasant American habit, these parting gifts.

New York, with its impressive city outline of gigantic buildings, its night panorama of electric lights, signs, a great visible pandemonium of progress and immensity, is an impressive city at which to arrive or leave. I saw it all fade away till nothing was left but a lurid reminiscence of blazing skies, growing every moment fainter and fainter. A city of warm-hearted people, New York, many of whom I left with a great regret. I felt that I was passing one of the few remaining milestones of life, and I found it hard during the first few days of the voyage to settle down to the scheme of work which Miss Symes and I had decided upon. A few bright sunny mornings, however, and the swift and easy progress of our 26,000-ton motor vessel—the *Britannic*—soon brought me back to normality, and I wrote the first chapters of the new novel on the second day of our voyage. I felt, however, what I have always felt, that New York is too vast, its tentacles too gripping, its atmosphere too absorbing to escape from easily. One should have been born in the place to remain unaffected by its almost stupefying influences.

Throughout the whole of my homeward voyage I repeated my experience of former days. I had arrived in a vague state of anticipated content, and I departed, notwithstanding the happy nature of my visit, in a rare spirit of depression. Perhaps the place itself is so vast that you lose in it your psychic balance. My companion declared that I was suffering from the nostalgic effect of a fit of elderliness, coupled with a Martini liver. Perhaps she was right.

Our voyage itself was monotonous. We encountered neither storms nor any form of physical discomfort. I am

not a very sociable person on board ship, but there were quite enough pleasant people with whom one could enjoy a cocktail before dinner or a brief chat afterwards. The fact that the *Queen Mary* was following us two days later deprived us, I think, of a good many interesting fellow-travellers, including the beautiful Blanche Knopf, the publisher's wife, whom I had hoped to find on board, and greatly admired on the few occasions when I have been fortunate enough to meet her. There was, however, a very delightful American actress on board, the daughter of Otis Skinner, going over to do a one-person show at the Little Theatre where, I saw in the papers afterwards, she had an extraordinary success. I was at her first night and greatly enjoyed it, but she did her best work later on when she had settled down more completely to her unusual surroundings.

I stayed in London on this occasion for rather more than a month and greatly enjoyed visiting my clubs and renewing my acquaintance with many old friends, from whom, during my many absences abroad, I had to a certain extent drifted away. Frynn Harwood, better known to fame as Tennyson Jesse, for whom I have always had a very great admiration, was one of these and, naturally enough, her husband, Tottie Harwood, whom everyone loves. I was lucky enough to come in for one of their first nights and thoroughly enjoyed the play. He is one of those men whom I should always describe as a thoroughly sound dramatist, successful, of course—but I cannot understand why he has not met with even more appreciation. His *Man in Possession* was, in my opinion, almost a perfect piece of work. I am not, and have never pretended to be, a dramatic critic, but so far as my judgement goes I have always placed *What Every Woman Knows*, *His House in Order*, *The Walls of Jericho* and *The Man in Possession* as four of the best-constructed modern plays which I have ever had the good fortune to see. Furthermore, and purely as a matter of chance, I happen to have had the

luck to be present at the first night of each one of them. Harwood is still a comparatively young man, at any rate young enough to have a future, and now that Somerset Maugham has left us severely alone for too long a time, I am always hoping we shall hear of a new Harwood.

I thoroughly enjoyed that month in London. I divided my time up and kept to my programme sedulously. I stayed in the vicinity of my beloved Milan Grill Room, worked for three days a week, lunched at the Garrick Club three days, and played bridge three afternoons. I found time for two rounds of golf either at Ranelagh or Woking. I dined once always in the week with my revered friend E. V. Lucas, had many cheerful luncheons with Henry Norman, and did not miss one of Mrs. Alec Tweedie's Thursdays. I was glad, however, to meet my wife on her return from the States, and after a few days in London we made our way back to our abode in Guernsey.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *A Fête Day in Guernsey*

IN Guernsey everyone owns a boat, goes to the cinema at least once a week and to church on Sunday. Everyone, too, within a certain circle of friends, gives two cocktail parties a summer, at which you meet the same people, varying in numbers from forty to one hundred and fifty. No bars or public-houses are open on the Sabbath, which accounts, I suppose, for the large number of loungers about the harbour and on the sea wall during that day. Everybody seems to have the air of waiting stolidly with a certain amount of sullen discontent for something which they know is never going to happen.

The small yacht on which we spent such pleasant times at Garoupe I sold very soon after leaving the South of France. I parted from her with great regret, but her draught made her an impossible proposition. She was too small to face the Bay of Biscay and the sea voyage home ; on the other hand, she drew just too much water for the canals. We compromised by re-christening the motor yacht I bought in Southampton the *Echo* and, although she never took quite the same place in our affections, she was considerably larger and her accommodation was much more adequate. We spent several very pleasant summers upon her.

My house in Guernsey was a stiff Cromwellian-looking building with a certain austere dignity of its own. The gardens were pleasant and prolific, but we were never quite at our ease there, for the day after I paid over the purchase money I was told that some land belonging to the adjoining estates which I had tried to buy might

possibly be used some day for the building of a mental hospital, and although all our friends tried to reassure us on the matter, we had periodic times of uneasiness, especially when strange men with measuring poles and a very official air about them were every now and then seen on the skyline. One great advantage about the house was that it possessed a very beautiful library and for the first time I was able to house with dignity the whole store of books I'd been collecting all my life. This was a very great pleasure and satisfaction to me but added unbecomingly to my stature, because I spent more time reading than I had ever done before and for the first time rather neglected taking the necessary amount of exercise. There were other disadvantages about the place, too, from the point of view of exercise—we had no tennis lawn. I never had any fancy for bowls, there is naturally no shooting on the island, and the golf club was a very poor sort of affair. A new club-house has now been built, however, in a far more suitable position, and of more attractive character.

We spent most of our time on the sea, but unless you have a mechanical turn of mind, which I have not, there is very little exercise to be got out of any motor vehicle whether it be car or boat. What we did enjoy was the fishing. The lust for destruction which, Bernard Shaw has told us, is the inevitable accompaniment of the Britisher's love of sport, seemed to have taken possession of the whole of my family, and, weather permitting, we sallied out, generally with one or two guests, three times a week during the season.

I must admit that sea fishing, although it has its own particular virtues and thrills, is not the highest form of sport. Our operations chiefly took place around the island of Sark, where, in certain sheltered places known to the local fishermen, we possessed lobster-pots and crab-pots, the dealing with which entailed nothing save the labour of pulling them up, and little skill save keeping the

boat off the rocks in stormy weather. The superintendence of both of these tasks was the duty of Roberts, the local fisherman, whom we engaged by the season. Our average catch of lobsters each time we drew the pots was about half a dozen, with an occasional crab. Of spider crabs we had always a surfeit, but these were only useful for bait, although our *matelot* of the yacht professed to prefer them to any other form of the crustacean species. There were often intruders into the pots whose presence we welcomed. Conger-eels, for instance, which make an excellent soup and are considered a delicacy upon the island ; also an occasional octopus, which we got rid of as soon as we could. Having stripped and rebaited the pots, we either went to a favourable spot for mixed fishing, of which pollock was the principal feature, or mackerel spinning, if the conditions were favourable. Mackerel spinning was the more exciting of the two. I think we generally preferred the pollock, because in certain parts of the sea these run to a very considerable size. An eight to ten pound pollock takes some landing and is almost as cunning a fish to deal with as a conger-eel. Most of the pollock, of course, are much smaller and, directly they feel the hook well imbedded in their gills, accept their fate with resignation. There were a few sea bream about, and an occasional turbot, but the latter showed a curious pre-dilection for the Casket lighthouses, where they are to be found sometimes in large quantities ; but to fish for them in their home waters required a boat of stronger construction than ours.

In the height of the season, the mackerel, of course, provide our largest catches, averaging often between seventy and a hundred and fifty fish. Other days when they were present but not biting they gave us a thoroughly bad time.

We never had much difficulty, even when our house party was reduced in numbers, in finding sufficient island guests who enjoyed a day's picnic and fishing. Some-

times if I were in the middle of an interesting piece of work, I preferred to go out alone or strictly *en famille*, and I have been known to stay out for several days on my mooring close to Sark harbour, fishing and bathing for a shorter period during the day and dictating to my secretary the rest of the time. Fifteen or twenty of my recent novels I can remember which owe their existence to the long dreamy hours I spent in this fashion. The atmosphere was always inspiring round Sark—a wonderfully picturesque island, a dark and scowling mass of sinister rock one day, a gay, colourful, flowery paradise when the sun shone. In those more solitary periods during the intervals of fishing and receiving with my wife a few casual guests who came aboard, I completed during that first summer in Guernsey an entire novel and six short stories. As a proof of what I have so often declared, that environment has little to do with the way one's ideas shape themselves in the brain, the sea is not even mentioned in one of those short stories, nor in the novel itself. It was a curious reproduction of the time when I was lent the famous Strozzi villa on the slopes of Fiesole to try my hand at writing an Italian novel and succeeded in producing one which began in Cumberland and ended in Devonshire.

We used sometimes to lunch or dine when we were lying in the harbour with that very delightful lady, the Dame of Sark, who has lately made quite a name for herself with her lectures and writing on the island over which she exercises a beneficent rule. Sometimes she and her American husband, a very charming person with the easy manners and good-humour of his race, returned our visits and coupled with them a fishing excursion. On such occasions our picnics on board were very pleasant festivals.

The Governor of Guernsey in those days was Sir Edward Broadbent, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., a very agreeable personage from whom we received much hospitality on shore. He was not, however, a great water man, and

Lady Broadbent, his very popular wife, could never be tempted on to anything smaller than a battleship. Colonel Brusson, on the other hand, the State Secretary, and his attractive wife were frequent visitors, as were several other of our local friends. Colonel Sherbrooke, who commanded the battalion of the Sherwood Foresters quartered on the island at that time, was very fond of a day on the sea, but he preferred to swim and to take a line only occasionally. His wife, on the other hand, would have fished every day of the week if the demands upon her social activities had not been so abundant. The mention of these friends of mine reminds me of an episode which had its humorous side although it afforded my wife and myself a considerable amount of embarrassment for a few terrible moments. The Sherwood Foresters, who were exceedingly popular on the island, were honoured during our residence there by a visit from their Colonel-in-Chief, General Sir Frederick Maurice, a soldier who had served in the 1914 war with great distinction and who is now a well-known military critic. He stayed during his visit with Colonel Sherbrooke and his wife, and we were asked to give him a day's sea fishing, which happened to be his favourite sport. His stay was so brief and his engagements so numerous that the only time which could be arranged for was the Sunday. Even then the Morning Service had to be fixed for an hour earlier, and as there was some sort of ceremony, having reference to the colours of the regiment, the General had to attend in full military kit. It was suggested that he should come on board quite early in the morning, and my wife and I decided, so as to run no risk of over-sleeping ourselves, that we would spend the night on board. There was a large dinner-party and a dance the night before, and we certainly did retire a little later than our usual hour. When the General somewhere in the small hours of the morning remarked that he should arrive on board good and early as he didn't wish to miss an hour of the fishing, it never

entered into my head, with the Church Service to be considered, that we should not have had ample warning of his coming. For once in our lives, however, we happened to over-sleep. I sat up in my bed to hear the shriek and the thunder of the drums and the fifes coming round the harbour. My wife heard the same sound at the same moment and was quicker than I to realise what was happening.

"Phillips!" she called out. "They're bringing the General straight down from the church!"

I was out of bed and into my trousers quicker than ever before in my life and found that it was exactly as my wife had said. Fortunately a fisherman's costume does not take much getting into, and more fortunately still, it was drizzling with rain so that a mackintosh concealed some of the deficiencies of my toilette, which consisted of my wearing my pyjama jacket and my dress trousers instead of the blue serge ones carefully put out for me. I scrambled on to the dock just as the brilliant little company came in sight. My captain had made no such mistake and was standing at attention in his best uniform. Round the corner our visitors swung, and fortunately we had the common sense to stand upright and take our cue from the aide-de-camp. We all stood to attention until the last note was heard from the band. There was a good deal of saluting, then the General with his A.D.C. came hurrying forward. He shook hands warmly, greeted my nervous captain as though he were an old friend, and stepped on board.

"Where can I get out of this clap-a-trap?" the General asked, removing his feathered head-dress. "We don't want to waste an hour of this drizzle! It's sure to bring the mackerel in."

I showed our guest my hastily prepared cabin where his orderly was already awaiting him.

"Wife will be down in five minutes!" he called out. "Then you'll have to deal with this thirst of mine."

In less than ten minutes the General in the dingiest pair of grey flannel trousers I have ever seen, an old flannel shirt, a battered yachting cap, and a pair of deck shoes, was on board. Eleven o'clock was striking, and my servant was swinging my largest cocktail-shaker.

"That's the music I like to hear in the morning after a night spent with you Guernsey racketeers," he declared, as my wife stepped forward to welcome him.

Taking that day all round, however, it was an extraordinarily lucky one in retrospect. The drizzle ceased, the grey mists rolled away before the burning sunshine as we rounded the corner of the Bulldog rocks. A faint opalescent rainbow appeared and disappeared in what seemed to be a matter of seconds. I have never seen the waters around the island a deeper blue or the grass ridges on the cliff-tops nearly a thousand feet above our heads such a wonderful green. It was high tide and we sailed close in. Lady Maurice gave a little cry of joy as the panorama slowly unfolded itself.

"It is the most beautiful piece of seascape I have ever seen," she declared.

"It isn't always like this," we were forced to admit.

It was a day when it seemed that nothing could go wrong. Roberts, our fisherman, was not only before his time on the mooring but he had succeeded in obtaining a double allowance of bait.

"Will you take the helm, sir?" I asked the General, as we all clambered down into the fishing-boat.

"My boy," was the enthusiastic reply, "there is nothing I should like better in the world."

I was a little dashed, for handling that rather clumsy boat was almost my only nautical accomplishment, but I was soon reconciled when I saw the skill which our distinguished passenger displayed. We went straight to the pollock ground and within a few moments the General had caught the first fish of the day, a feat which I always rewarded with half a crown. He accepted it with a

chuckle and we went to work in earnest. We had a decent catch in less than an hour, drew two pots only which contained above the average number of lobsters, a large crab which was an unusual event and, to the General's delight, a huge conger-eel who made things very lively indeed in the boat until he was secured with the usual nose-ring. That was the extent of our fishing before lunch, which was served as usual on the deck of the yacht under an awning, on a roughly-built but convenient table. Our own lobsters, caught the day before, and served with the mayonnaise which was one of our cook's specialities, with fresh crisp lettuce salad, went very well indeed, and, as a matter of fact, an alfresco luncheon in the wonderful keen fresh air round the islands easily produces an appetite which I do not think I have ever felt before or since. The Dame and her husband, who had joined us for luncheon, left immediately afterwards to welcome some visitors at their own Seigneurie and we rather missed the latter's repertory of American stories, but the business of the day was yet to come. We had no sooner settled down on the pollock ground than I saw Hobbs and Roberts conferring together, both shading their eyes and pointing to a curious streak in the distance.

"Mackerel!" I exclaimed.

Even as I spoke we could see them, little glittering specks of silver jumping a few inches out of the water. Up came our anchor, away we went, out came the mackerel lines with the dazzling spinners attached. One of my lady guests was first this time in the field, and from the moment the first fish was landed there was not one of us who was not landing mackerel, detaching them from the hook as fast as possible, throwing them into the zinc buckets and preparing for the next. How they pulled, those lusty young fish, when they first felt the tickle of the hook, and how they held on! It may not be a very subtle form of sport to catch mackerel with a spinner, but there is something about it curiously satisfying. A pollock lies

down in a comatose sort of state when he is fairly unhooked and in the pail, but a mackerel is game to the end. He lies quite still for a half-minute or so and all of a sudden his eyes protrude and he jumps about in all directions. After that he gives in, but never with that placid and philosophic indifference with which the pollock succumbs to fate.

We left off fishing early that day. For one thing, fishing is really not allowed at all around the island on Sunday, and for another, our guests had a dinner engagement. Our catch, so far as I remember, was about a hundred mackerel, thirty pollock, a dozen lobsters and four rather fine conger-eels. Our guests took leave of us with real cordiality and we had the satisfaction of knowing that they had really had the sort of day they loved, but our farewells were rather superfluous as Guernsey is a small island and we knew perfectly well we were all to meet again in a different sort of attire before the day was over.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *A Paradise of Peace*

THE most interesting part of writing one's memoirs is the necessity of drawing some of the threads of one's life a little closer together. The more I think over the period of our life in Guernsey the more I realise a sympathy and liking for the place which I never developed, perhaps for the same reason that my wife made more friends there and achieved a larger amount of popularity. Dining one night with some friends at a non-bridging house, I lingered for some time with our host over the port. We had been growing a little personal in conversation, but after all where can one find a more fruitful subject of talk than the men and women of our daily life? It may seem like gossip, but it isn't.

"You certainly seem to enjoy life here," I remarked.

"And you don't?" he rejoined.

We were near enough to friendship to enable me to tell the truth, but on this occasion I hesitated.

"Well, I don't like afternoon bridge for one thing," I reminded him. "I don't care very much for bridge, anyway, and I hate the cinema. I don't dislike conversation and there is plenty of that at these eternal cocktail parties, which are sometimes quite amusing. I share most of the Guernsey people's fondness for the sea, too—there's another bond. I'm a writer, of course, but only a story-writer. Most of the inhabitants of the island read far more intelligent literature than I even take an interest in. They must wonder sometimes why I bought a house here."

My host smiled. "For the same reason as a great

many of us, I suppose—*income tax*? There is a little clique in these parts, of course, who object to strangers who settle here and in Jersey simply to avoid *income tax*."

I allowed my host to replenish my glass.

"I expect that's really the reason," I meditated, "why my wife seems so much more popular upon the island than I am."

"Your wife would be popular anywhere."

"She gets on better with people than I do," I confided. "She takes to strangers much more readily. Well, in my case the *income tax* business doesn't work out. I save no income at all by living here. Mine is an earned income, and from every payment I receive from England or the United States the *income tax* is deducted at source."

My host rose to his feet and stubbed out his cigarette.

"Well, I don't think you have anything to complain of," he said good-humouredly. "As a matter of fact, women nearly always do find their way about strange places more readily than men. Get it off your chest," he suggested. "Write a novel about it."

I considered the question seriously for a few moments. It would not be such a bad subject—a man's jealousy of his own wife in the midst of a slightly congested but brilliant little clique of society. I suggested the idea to Elsie as we drove home later that evening. She laughed at me scornfully.

"What an idea! Did you hear old Colonel Herbert going for me this evening because I took that finesse in clubs? And his scowl, too! Then look at those women who bring books for you to sign. No one has ever asked me to sign anything on this island except the Governor's book, or the bailiff's."

I was a trifle mollified.

"Women don't come into this, though," I told her.

"Sex comes into everything," she said drily.

"And perhaps it's my known devotion to you——"

I went on.

I wasn't allowed to finish the sentence. I don't know that there was anything more to say, really, for my interest in the subject had petered out. The only pinprick that stimulated the remaining curiosity was the possibility of drama creeping into the lives of husbands and wives through too close association with one another. I was not happy until I had run that idea to ground and remembered. A few old letters brought it all back to me. There it was, one of my earliest recollections of friendship with members of the profession to which I was in those days only a humble aspirant. The Williamsons ! The life of those two people, even though I saw so little of it, their devotion to one another, their admiration of each other's work, seemed to me one of the most perfect things I could ever conceive in a literary or domestic partnership. C. N. and Alice Williamson ! It seemed to me that I could almost see them once more standing on the lawn arm in arm, only apart for a few minutes during the business of receiving their guests. Their combination of work was so perfect, their affection for each other one of the most delightful things conceivable. The few days and evenings I spent with them so many years ago now were an education to me. They made me realise the beauty of an affection free from any worldly taint. They were happy in their joint work because each loved the other's share in it. Many people, I am afraid, have forgotten the Williamsons. They wouldn't have minded it in the least. Wherever they are now, they are together, which is just what they would have prayed for.

The only other person I met in my life who showed that perfect spirit of kindness, that simple desire to see other people happy, to help them if they needed help, their superior, perhaps, in mentality and in accomplishments but with the same joyous and friendly outlook on life, was William J. Locke. There is a small grey stone memorial to him in the cemetery at Cannes which I visited not so very long ago. I stood by its side and looked up

towards his beloved Estérels and it seemed to me that the whole of the blue distance might have been laced with the flowers and jewels of his kindly words, his kindly thoughts and generous attitude towards his fellows.

Years ago, it seems now, I found Alice Williamson in London and we spent the evening together. She had lost that look of settled peace which she once wore so wonderfully and no one could possibly have mistaken her for a happy woman. Later on I called at the place where she was staying, somewhere near Bath, I think, and she told me quite simply, as though it was the most ordinary thing in the world, that she was giving up working.

"I went on because I was told to," she confided simply.  
"I am leaving off now because I was told to."

There were a few other things that she said, beautiful tributes to the undying love of her life, but they were not meant for memoirs, not even for print. I have always fancied that after her husband's death she continued her apparent life as an unvisualised spirit rather than a human being.

Guernsey has a habit of shedding its summer magnificence with scant notice to its shivering inhabitants, who, if they are sensible folk, and most of the Guernsey people are, fall to studying winter cruises in the neutral atmosphere of London, or flit away to the Riviera. We were still hesitating as to our own plans when we found ourselves lunching one day with the Henry Normans at their charmingly original town house at the corner of Smith Square. Henry, looking brown and robust, had just returned from a summer spent at Garoupe and was just as enthusiastic as ever about the spot where we had spent so many happy days together.

"Would you like to go to the Clos for a time," he suggested, "and look round? That is to say," he corrected himself, "if Fay has no plans for the place."

"None at all," she declared promptly. "The Clos

can be let a dozen times over in the summer but it isn't a winter abode."

"Winter on the Côte d'Azur hasn't arrived yet," my wife remarked.

Fay shrugged her shoulders.

"We shan't let the Clos now until next spring," she assured us. "Go there with pleasure, if you would like to. There are a couple of servants in the place I should want you to keep on, and if you did, that is all the responsibility you'd incur. As you know, there are no gardens to keep up, but you can have all the flowers you want from the château."

I glanced at my wife. There was no doubt about her appreciation of this wonderful offer.

"We accept with joy and gratitude," I declared, "on one condition. That is, if any genuine would-be tenants come along, you let us clear out."

"It's very nice of you to offer," Fay Norman observed. "We'll leave that in your hands, but we shan't expect it and I don't honestly think it will happen. I know your servants are always well trained and careful and there is no one I'd like better to have about the place."

So there it was, all arranged for us. The Clos de Garoupe was a long grey stone building of two storeys only, which were really converted gardeners' cottages, but converted so skilfully and tastefully that they were always let for the summer season and were an ideal home for anyone who was fond of the sea. They were occupied for two months every summer by Lady Mendl, the wife of our literary and diplomatic representative who held a special post in the British Embassy at Paris. I first met Lady Mendl when she was Elisabeth Marbury's secretary in New York. Elisabeth was a great power in the dramatic world in those days, and she told me on my first meeting with her that there were enough first-class plays in my last six novels to keep me for the rest of my life. I immediately placed the whole of my play interests in her

hands and the hands of her London agent, Golding Bright, but I must confess that, although she made the fortunes of several men whose interests she had furthered in their younger days, she had no luck with me, as I can't remember that she ever made successful arrangements for the dramatisation of any of my stories. She gave most delightful parties, however, where I met very many interesting people, and she has always remained with me as an agreeable though unprofitable memory.

In a few weeks we were on our way south by car, not such a simple task as before we came to live in Guernsey. There were a great many formalities to go through and a great many papers to sign. The first stage of the journey took us over to Jersey, where we had to spend twenty-four hours, see the car properly embarked for St. Malo, and pay our respects to the French Consul, whose business it was to endorse all our papers and in a general way vouch for our authenticity. During this period of waiting we found time to call upon our neighbour in France who has a beautiful house on the island, Lady Trent. She had been seized with the same idea as ourselves, however, and had departed for Cannes two days before our arrival. We tried to play golf but found the fact that there were no caddies to be had, and that golf was looked upon coldly by the inhabitants as a Sabbath pastime, effectually interfered with our efforts. We therefore took a drive at about five miles an hour in a one-horse shay round the recommended parts of the island, and returned to our hotel with the conviction that, in the absence of Lady Trent, the only human thing upon the island was the French Consul.

We were off without regrets the next day and had a delightful trip through France along the "well-trodden" roads, reached Cannes comfortably on the fourth day, and sent over to apprise the housekeeper at the Clos of our impending arrival. We passed through some of the famous Château district on our way down, and we discovered one quite small but perfect little hotel where the

rooms and service were absolutely de luxe and the cooking marvellous. Everything was of the homeliest style but perfect of its sort. You chose your own food, which was brought into the so-called dining-room and cooked on an enormous grill before your eyes. It is a rather piquant way of dealing with the cuisine, which I thoroughly appreciated because I am a fervent admirer of grill-room cooking. To wander over and see how your chicken is getting on and to watch the various adjuncts of your forthcoming repast being slipped into their place is a somewhat new idea ; and to know that your fish has been timed to be perfectly ready to serve up exactly twenty minutes before your chicken, is by way of being a novelty. We ate too much of that wonderful dinner, we drank too much of the wine carefully selected by our host, we walked too far into the night amidst the ghostly shadows of the château, and we tumbled into bed dead-tired, enjoyed a sleep free from nightmares and insomnia, to which we had not the slightest right, and awoke in the morning with all the greedy instincts we possessed striving to find some excuse for staying where we were for luncheon. I look upon it as one of the most selfish impulses of my life that I deliberately refuse to remember the name of that wonderful little hotel or the village in which it is situated.

The rest of the journey passed uneventfully. We lunched excellently, as one always does just outside Lyon —this time I have *really* forgotten the name of the place. We found Brignoles as pleasant as usual, and, as I have already said, we slept on the fourth night in Cannes with the pinpricks of fire around the Cap already in sight and with the knowledge that on the other side of the low hill was Garoupe.

We entered upon the next few months full of anticipation, and such disappointments as we encountered were of our own making. I bathed the first morning of our arrival about the middle of October. I am the only

maniac of our household who likes to go on with this delightful pastime long after the season is over, and I bathed nearly every day until the end of the first week in December. The catarrh which had troubled me in Guernsey very nearly disappeared and the urge to work began to make itself felt again.

Our first visitors, as soon as we had settled down, were the Baroness Orczy and her artist husband, Montagu Barstow. We thoroughly enjoyed seeing them again. Emmuska was as gay and entertaining as ever and we spent a short but very happy time together. She told us many quaint stories of her sudden devotion to film work, talked of her new volume which we had already read with enthusiasm, and envied me the peace of Garoupe which in November was a very delightful thing.

We had other visitors, too—my old friend (although very considerably my junior in years) Alfred Tennyson found us there and led me away to play golf at Cagnes-sur-Mer once or twice a week, which was good for my health but not quite so satisfactory from a work point of view. Alfred was also rather fond of a quiet gamble, and when once we found ourselves in the Casino at Cannes or Monte Carlo, it was sometimes a little difficult to tear ourselves away. Those were very pleasant months of relaxation, for, on the whole, mine had been a life of hard work, and if I had known what was ahead of me I think perhaps I would have taken even more of those occasional excursions than I permitted myself at the time.

People have often asked me whether I won or lost at the mild form of gambling in which I occasionally took part. It is very hard to say, for one is always inclined to magnify one's winnings and slip a few of those bad nights out of one's memory. On the whole, however, I should think I have come off pretty even. The very large win on the night of the closing of the old Sporting Club, to which I have referred in a previous chapter, I have always taken into account because the money was promptly

invested and went into savings. I have had one or two bad years to set against that, but on the whole gambling has not at any time seriously diminished my earnings. Miss Symes, the secretary, who during our sojourn at Garoupe had been with me about six years and whom it had amused to take account of my wins and losses, brings me out level for the last six years, and, after all, the pleasure counts for something. Roulette may seem a senseless game to play but it gives you lots of fun, and anyone who has been using during the daytime even an apology for a brain needs relaxation and amusement towards its close. Personally I don't think bridge is the best form of brain relaxation because its first essential is concentration, and my own idea is that concentration is the hardest form of brain exercise. I would sooner play snooker pool, dance or go to a musical comedy. However, everyone to his taste.

To return to our stay at the Clos, I cannot remember a period of time, during the latter portion of my life at any rate, when life seemed to flow more smoothly, when we both, I think I may say, my wife and I, felt more satisfied with the gliding days. We watched the early spring break out within the confines of our temporary domain. It was England all over again, with always that haunting sweetness of the sea and the grass-grown carpets of the woods, the gently swelling buds of the chestnut trees and limes. The perfume of the pines was always with us, and soon came stronger scents of seaweed dashed high and dry by March and April winds. This was just the one time of the year when bathing dropped out of our daily programme, for me at any rate, for I was well on in my sixties now, and that is the time when one gets into the dangerous habit of floating in the early sunshine rather than meeting the waves boldly and striking out for the surf-topped breakers with swelling muscles. We wandered inland in those days—wandered into the woods, saw the birth of countless strange variations of yellow flowers, many varieties of primroses, wild orchids and orchises. Sweet-

scented shrubs grow plentifully amongst the undergrowth in the woods and the nightingales begin to sing in the olive trees, to reproach you in the early mornings and gladden your heart at many other times of the day, for the nightingales of France are not really night birds, they love the early morning when the world still sleeps just as much as those fragrant evenings and languid afternoons. The coming of spring on the Riviera finds very few people of our own race ready to greet it. We are all following the busy trend of life in other directions. The enticement of the pleasure-packed cities has its own peculiar call, the music of the opera, the song of the early flower-seller in the morning streets, our country gardens making their own fervent appeal—the smell of bending lilac in the air, the fainter, more aromatic, perfume of geraniums, the heliotrope, the lazy night flowers closing their petals to the farewell song of the night birds. Flower-soaked London, the shops brimming over with masses of blossom, our country cottage with its more humble offering waiting for us—all wonderful ! The real Londoner, perhaps, even more than the wanderer, must worship the coming of spring-time.

Well, we should have obeyed the call, I suppose. One more Eton and Harrow, and certainly one more Gentlemen v. Players, a couple of days, if it wasn't raining, at the Oval with Surrey v. Yorkshire, always a favourite match of mine and one which E. V. Lucas and I celebrated together for some years. E. V. had been elected to the committee of the Surrey Club a year or two before and took great interest in the colts, even going so far as to smoke an evening cigar sometimes round at the nets, looking for budding genius. It was always my boast that I discovered Pougher in my younger days when I lived in Leicestershire. He had the most beautiful easy style I have ever seen for a fast bowler, and more years ago than many of you can remember he routed the Australians for their smallest score when they came down to play Leicester-

shire, admittedly the weakest county of their tour. E. V. never discovered a Pougher amongst his young men but he was nevertheless an excellent judge of form and seldom made a mistake. Cricket was the only game I've ever been able to watch with pleasure and never find it wearisome, and I still hang on to my membership of the Oval and Lord's.

We were still at the Clos just about the time other people were thinking about Ascot. We had already commenced to pack, as our time was up and the Clos let to its usual tenant. We were feeling rather sorry for ourselves up at the château for lunch on our last day, when Elizabeth Russell, who was a fellow guest, quite unexpectedly made us a wonderful offer.

"I am going to Switzerland to see my daughter," she said. "I was going to start packing up at the Mas des Roses tomorrow. Come and occupy the villa for me."

We were both speechless. The idea of Elizabeth ever letting her habitation, so daintily cared for, so exquisite in detail, seemed incredible, but she really meant it.

"It would suit me quite well," she assured us. "I have not the heart to refuse all the invitations my dear friends keep sending me and my work is absolutely at a standstill. You must keep my servants on. That is all I ask of you. I would not like anyone disturbed except the chauffeur, whom I shall take with me. All are good; my cook is extravagant, but she, too, has such a sweet manner, I am sure you won't mind that. My gardener isn't exactly energetic but quite the best-looking young man in the neighbourhood, except for that film star staying at the Cap. What do you say?"

There wasn't any doubt about what two thoroughly sane people like my wife and myself would be likely to say, so instead of moving over to London for a month, as we had thought of doing, we ordered a camion next day and moved into one of the most charming and attractive villas on the Côte d'Azur.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *A momentous Luncheon Party*

AN exceedingly good-looking elderly man of about my own age, I imagined, leaned across Henry Norman's hospitable luncheon table at the château a few days after our return from a flying visit to London and addressed me by name.

"Did I hear that you were looking for a bungalow in these parts, Mr. Oppenheim?" he asked.

"Something about the size of a bungalow," I assented, "and about the price of one. The 'bungalow type' of dwelling I really don't care much about."

"I quite agree with you," my *vis-à-vis* observed. "I had enough of them out in the East. Uncomfortable style of architecture except for the very hot climates. You should have a look at the place I want to sell."

A friend near by demanded his attention and the conversation ended temporarily. I turned to my neighbour, a very charming woman who had so far been monopolised by my host.

"Tell me," I enquired, "who is the good-looking man opposite there? I feel I ought to know him but I didn't catch his name. He arrived rather late, didn't he?"

She nodded.

"We always do," she confessed. "It's our only fault as guests, Lady Norman would tell you. I thought everyone knew Charlie McNeill."

"Why, he's your husband!"

"Of course he is," she replied, "and it's our little house he is offering you. I never thought anything would induce him to sell it, but times have changed."

" You don't mean that it was the Domaine de Notre Dame he was speaking of ? "

" Of course I do. It's been his hobby, that place, since he restored it twelve years ago," she confided. " It's let to Lord Darnley now."

I smiled.

" I like his idea of a bungalow."

" It's really quite small," she assured me. " Most of the rooms are tiny."

" But what on earth makes him want to sell it ? " I asked. " I thought it was the hobby of his life ! "

" It has been," she agreed, " but all men get tired of their hobbies—and their wives, nowadays."

" Well, as there's no chance of my ever being a purchaser," I said, " I don't mind telling you that the Domaine de Notre Dame is the one estate on the Riviera that I have coveted for ten or fifteen years. My wife and I have driven by it dozens of times, gone out of our way whenever we have been anywhere near there, just to have a look at it."

" It is picturesque," my neighbour admitted, " and of course the gardens, when properly looked after, could be anything. I like that rough-and-tumble sort of surroundings and a meadow or two and some good trees. I wonder what made you take such a fancy to it ? "

" I can tell you," I replied. " It's Provençal, there's no fault you could find with the restoration, it has remained beautiful. For another thing, it is perfectly set with that background of mountains, uneven terraced gardens and meadow in front."

" Come and look at it some time," she invited. " We're turning Darnley out next week and going back ourselves."

" We should love to come, I'm sure," I replied, " but not as prospective purchasers. If we buy anything out here, it would have to be something far less ambitious."

" I am not sure that either of us really wants to sell it," she reflected. " The only trouble is that Charlie has all

Benjamin Guinness' estates to look after and his yearlings as well, and it's getting rather hard work for him."

" And you ? "

" I think I love my little flat in Paris almost as much as Notre Dame, though quite in a different way," she confided. " The trouble is that Notre Dame is always at its best just when I want to be somewhere else."

It was a large luncheon party and after coffee we all strolled about the grounds and down to the sea. I came across my wife with McNeill and it struck me that they were both looking rather interested.

" I've changed my mind, Phillips," she announced. " I always said if I came across the man who owned Notre Dame I should hate him, and I don't hate Mr. McNeill at all."

" You really like the old place ? " he observed. " Well, it has been my great hobby for years, and it is only since I took on all this extra work for Guinness that I dreamed of parting with it. As it is, I shall go on loving it, but I'm going to sell it to your husband."

My wife's laugh was as derisive as my own smile.

" What's the matter with you both ? " he demanded. " There's no trick about the place, I can assure you. It wasn't built to fade away in a night, and the ghosts they talk about don't really do anybody any harm. It's what house agents would call ' a most desirable and picturesque old property. ' "

" But not a bungalow," I ventured.

" Bungalow price ! " McNeill assured me.

" Let me see, I was once told how much you refused for it when the Country Club——"

" Yes, I know," he interrupted, " but that was in the days when everyone had heaps of money. I've kicked myself for refusing that deal many a time since."

" What makes it more impossible than ever," I went on, perhaps a little dolefully, " is that only a short time ago I bought a house in Guernsey."



Off Sark - E.C.O. and E.P.O.  
Waiting for Guests from  
*La Seigneurie*.



"Whatever on earth did you do that for?"

"I don't know," I told him, truthfully enough. "I think I wanted to be nearer home."

"In any case, you can't live there all the year round," he argued. "Guernsey might do very well for a headquarters, but what on earth would we do out here without your Riviera stories?"

"I'm looking for a bungalow to write them in," I reminded him. "You're a man of big ideas."

"Not a bit of it," he insisted. "Why, I've lived in half a dozen bungalows in India and other parts of the world containing twice as many rooms as Notre Dame. Tell you what," he went on, "come and lunch with us tomorrow and have a look at the place."

My wife shook her head.

"We can't," she regretted; "we're lunching in Cannes."

"I'll fetch you afterwards, then."

"I'm afraid, so far as Notre Dame is concerned," I told him, "it would be wasting your time, but I'd love to see the place at closer quarters."

"Settled," he declared cheerfully. "I'll call for you at three o'clock. I know whom you are lunching with; you'll have had enough of it by then. A big affair, too. You'll be able to slip away quite quietly. I'll call for you at three o'clock."

"We'll be ready," my wife promised.

We stayed late at the Normans' that afternoon. Henry and I planned an evening's swim. He took me to task on the beach, as he often did.

"You're not seriously thinking of buying Notre Dame, Phillips, are you?" he asked.

"Not I," I replied. "If ever I bought anything down here again I'd like something of a size even smaller than the Clos."

"The Clos is quite large enough for two people," he

agreed. "Fay would never part with it, though. She'd rather be there than at the château."

"I don't blame her."

"There's no chance of the Clos ever being for sale," Henry went on, "but if you do buy another property on the Riviera, you ought to be near the sea. You can't afford to waste hours every morning getting there and back for a bathe."

"Quite right," I assented.

"Of course, McNeill may have come down in his price a good deal," my companion continued. "I believe he has, as a matter of fact, but it's rather like a dungeon inside. I should wait, before you even begin to look at houses, until your American affairs get a little more settled."

I nodded acquiescence.

"Did you get those two delayed payments you were speaking of?"

"Not yet," I admitted. "I fancy coming down here has rather upset my mail."

"Well, anyhow, wait for a bit," Henry advised me. "Charlie McNeill is a delightful fellow, but if he wants a thing he's a tremendous rusher and carries you off your feet almost. He's the same type that you might have been yourself if you'd remained in business."

"I should never have been a speculator."

"I'm not so sure."

"Well, I'll tell you something just to show you I'm not quite so reckless as you think. For twenty-five years I haven't spent more than three-quarters of my income."

"I'm delighted to hear it."

"I paid for my house in Guernsey before I set foot in it—"

"Capital!"

"And I've never borrowed a penny in my life, even from the bank."

"You're a marvel," he declared, smiling his approval.

" You always give one an idea of being extravagant. Fay thinks you are."

I shook my head.

" I should like to be," I admitted. " There are heaps of times, even lately, when I wanted to spend money and haven't. I've a very good example in Elsie," I told him. " She likes the best of everything but she really hates spending money. She goes to the most expensive dress-makers and has one gown made where other women would order half a dozen. It's the same with jewellery. She never lets me spend any money on jewels, except pearls. She simply says it isn't worth while, imitations now are so perfect, and nowadays jewellery must go with your gowns."

We had our swim and afterwards we sat with a somewhat gay group in the bar of the Cap bathing-pool. Teddy Gerrard was there. I hadn't seen her for years, only once, indeed, since she was in my only play at the Garrick. Leslie Henson and his wife were entertaining some newcomers. Beautiful Barbara Bach was there with Ivor and a crowd of admirers. Altogether it was a very gay and festive little company.

On our way back to Elizabeth Russell's villa, where we were then staying in great content and happiness, my wife took my arm.

" I'm looking forward tremendously," she confided, " to seeing inside Notre Dame."

" I want to see how far those woods go back," I told her, " and whether any room in the house would make a study."

She looked at me sternly.

" Remember," she said, " you're not to dream of buying it."

" I'm not mad," I assured her.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *The Day of Fate*

EVERYONE has his own ideas about the house he chooses to live in, and I shall say no more about Notre Dame except that it was the one abode I have ever seen which brought me, notwithstanding the period of adversity which I was doomed to suffer beneath its roof, the most complete satisfaction. It brought me the one gift I had always prized in a home—tranquillity. There was at no time the whistle or hooting of tramcar or train within hearing distance. The nearest country road was seldom invaded by even a motor-car. The song of winds and birds and occasionally the monotonous chunk of the woodman's axe were the only sounds which broke in upon the golden silence. It offered rest and tranquillity to the harassed wanderer. It brought them, in later days, to the tortured fugitive. I must remember, however, that I had not as yet committed that gloriously improvident act and purchased the Domaine from my genial friend who spent that happy afternoon years ago wandering round the place with me.

"As to the exact boundaries, you would have to find those out from Marc," McNeill told me. "When I first began to buy the place, there were about twenty small owners of land to be considered. We've got rid of most of them, and that piece of land I bought across the road with the wood at the top and the fine avenue of pines was the best deal I ever made in my life."

"The possible purchaser would have to find out from Marc," I murmured, with a nonchalance that was entirely artificial, for by that time the lust for possession was in my blood.

"Just so," my companion agreed. "I don't want to anticipate, but you'll have to buy the place. It was meant for someone of your profession who needed solitude. Even Darnley has taken to painting pictures since he came here."

Marc, a sturdy well-built Frenchman of middle age, was the general factotum of the place. He knew the history of every room and had watched the planting of many of the trees, and he could tell you the mystery of the ghosts and the bricked-up secret passage to the church on the hill. He was almost British in his conservatism and dislike of change, and it occurred to me at the time that he was perfectly well satisfied with his present master and Darnley for a tenant. He was an independent fellow, too, and at times deliberately refused to back up some of his master's phantasies.

"What on earth made them build these stout iron grills all round the lower windows of the house?" I asked.  
"Robbers, I suppose."

"Not at all," McNeill assured me. "The house was occupied in the sixteenth century by three vintners, brothers. The wine of Notre Dame was very good in those days and in great demand. The three brothers lived together, as was customary then, and had large families of daughters. When the day came for the annual tasting and sale of the wine up at Bar-le-Duc, the house was deserted by all except the vintners' daughters, hence the iron bars on the lower windows and the two-feet-thick doors about the place. Turned into a fortress it was, to keep young men away, wasn't it, Marc?"

The steward coughed.

"I'm not quite sure that's the right story, sir," he replied. "Round about here they seem to think that the bars were built to keep the young boars from getting in on winter nights when they came down from the mountains."

"Either explanation is quite romantic enough," I said,

smiling. "In any case, they're the most ornamental protection I've ever seen. What's the history of that well there, Marc?"

"No more fairy tales," McNeill insisted. "If you get Marc telling you the romances of the place, if he tells you the story of the Abbess' garden up there, for instance, and shows you the outside stone steps leading to the Abbess' bedroom, we shall be getting very near the period of what used to be considered minor improprieties."

My wife, who had just climbed the worn stone steps, looked out from the window of the room in question.

"No more horrors, please," she begged. "I have just made up my mind that if ever we are lunatics enough to buy the house, this would be my bedroom."

"If you're getting the fever, too," I grunted, "it's time we went home."

"Wait!" McNeill insisted dramatically. "The moment has not yet arrived! Hold tight to the window, Mrs. Opp, I am going to tell your husband the price."

"It wouldn't be worth while," I assured him, almost piteously.

The owner laid his hand on my shoulder. "You know," he said, "as many others do, the price I refused for this property less than fifteen years ago. Now I am going to tell you what I'll take from you, my friend, today, in cash. It will be a shock to you, but a shock of joy. Listen. £\_\_\_\_\_. As it stands!"

He stood back as though to see how I survived the disclosure.

"It's a reasonable price," I admitted.

"Reasonable!"

"At any rate, it encourages me to tell you the second and final obstacle to my purchase of the place," I confided. "Apart from the money question altogether, neither my wife nor I have more than the ordinary amateurs' understanding of antique furniture. We could never for a moment trust ourselves to buy suitable furniture for the

place which you and your wife have restored so perfectly. You yourself admitted that you took two years to furnish it piece by piece. It would take us twice as long and then we should make a mess of it."

He smiled and looked at me benevolently.

"Do you imagine," he demanded, "that I was thinking of such an act of barbarism as to remove furniture from this place and take it away with me? I told you the price of the house and estate. Now you can look through these papers whenever you like," he went on, producing a roll from his pocket. "Here is the list of every piece of furniture in the place with the original invoices. They are all added up there at cost price—at exactly what my wife and I paid for them. The whole of our experience in bargaining is thrown into the melting-pot. With the exception of the dining-room table and three absolutely ordinary pieces of junk of Darnley's, the whole of the furniture is included in the price I whispered. As it stands, I said, and as it stands I meant. There you are—estate, house, outbuildings and furniture. Take the lot away and talk to your wife about it. Come on, Mrs. Opp, come on, Connie, I have to pack a bag and catch the Blue Train."

"Even if Phillips were mad enough to buy the house," my wife said, as she took her place in the car, "I wouldn't live in the house without that dining-room table."

For a moment I thought that our friend was going to be angry. I think his wife saved the situation.

"The table," she said firmly, "is worth £350 more than we gave for it. On the other hand, Charles, remember it is too large for 'Maryland' or your house at Bailleul and you couldn't possibly get it into your rooms at Newmarket."

McNeill took the roll of papers from my pocket and wrote upon the bottom of the furniture page: *including dining-room table.*

We said goodbye to Marc and drove off.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### *A Scotchman knows the Way*

I SHOULD hate to be obliged to say how many times Elsie and I visited Notre Dame during the next fortnight. As a matter of fact, I think we were there every day on some pretext or other except one Sunday when it rained and we saw evidences that Lord Darnley, who always was extraordinarily good-natured about our visits, was entertaining a party. On the last day he took me out to inspect the whole orchard of peach trees he had just planted, which, I may remark in passing, have never yet produced a single peach.

"So you're off in a day or two," he remarked, when I told him we had come to the end of our stay. "I don't suppose you have any idea of buying the place, have you?"

"Well, I don't know," I answered, "it's extraordinarily attractive."

"I can see that you feel the charm of it as I do," he said. "Like all these old places going on for generations, it still wants money spent on it, though. I have a family abode of my own to look after in Kent and I can't afford to do it."

"It is just one of those places," I reflected, "that might easily be spoilt by spending money on it in the wrong way."

"You're absolutely right," he responded enthusiastically. "I should not, even if I were a millionaire, touch the outside or even the interior, but, by God, I would do some planting. Every sort of plant known to man would flourish either on the terrace or in those deep cool

hollows there, if only one could afford manure and the cost of gardeners to look after them. The fruit trees, also, are mostly gone to seed. Every inch outside wants replanting and restoring, but inside—well, I don't know if you get the same feeling that I do, but it seems to me there's a sort of gentle dignity about the place that is most impressive. One can only imagine," he said simply, "the nicest sort of people living here."

We walked on down to the gate, or rather the place where the gate had been but isn't now. He commented on the fact as we lingered there for a moment.

"Do you know," he told me, "I've seen and had submitted to me forty-eight plans of gates in nearly every possible style and I've never found one that goes with the place yet."

"I can see the difficulty," I acknowledged. "Elizabeth Russell's is the only gate I can remember that would seem in keeping."

"It's a beautiful piece of work," he admitted, "but alas, if you look closely, it is flagrantly modern. Now there's the back gate at a château a few miles from here that belongs to a Frenchman of very old family. They tell me the house is filled with treasures and he lives on sixpence a week. In fact, the steward generally has to pay the bills but the owner has never sold a thing in his life and never will. Yet he's got the only gate that would hang between our posts. What can you do with a fellow like that?"

"There's nothing to be done in the world," I declared. "It's sad, though. Wasn't it Ruskin who told us that beauty can resist every form of decay in the world except rust?"

Darnley held out his hand.

"Well, goodbye," he said, "if you're sure you won't have a drink before you go. Drop me a line if you see Charlie in London and decide to buy the place. It might make a difference to my plans."

"Would it be a blow to you if I did?" I asked.

"It would be a shock," he admitted frankly. "I've been in and out as a tenant for so long I feel I've got a share in the place, but I'll tell you this. He has pressed me hard to buy it lately. He rather wants to clear out of the South of France itself for a time, but he never offered it to me at the price he told me he has quoted to you."

I stepped into my car and was driven off. When I returned a month or so later it seemed to me that I'd achieved one of the desires of my life. My wife and I owned the Domaine of Notre Dame.

There was no romance about the conclusion of my purchase. I was seated in the salon of the hotel in Piccadilly where I always used to stay when in London and the hall porter called me up from below.

"A gentleman called to see you, sir," he announced. "His name has slipped my memory for the moment, but he's always in and out of the Turf Club next door when he's in town. He has been in to see you once or twice too."

"McNeill?" I suggested.

"That's it, sir. Colonel McNeill."

"Ask him to step up," I begged.

McNeill was shown up, gay, good-looking, and with the air which a certain type of Londoner always possesses of going to the only tailor who can really cut clothes and the only hosier who understands the art of selecting shirt patterns and the proper silks for morning ties.

"Hard at it?" he asked.

I waved my secretary into the background.

"Dictating a few letters," I told him. "Nothing pressing."

"I want a cheque for £1000," my visitor observed, sitting cross-legged on the chair I pointed out.

"Blackmail?" I enquired.

"Deposit on the purchase of a certain property at Roquefort-les-Pins entitled the Domaine of Notre Dame."

I turned to my secretary.

"My cheque-book, please."

She laid it before me and I dictated a few lines to her which she typed.

"The purchase to be concluded before what date?" I asked, with the pen still in my hand.

"I should love to have the money by the end of the month," my caller confessed.

I glanced at my diary.

"That's up to you, then," I told him. "I'm off to Cannes the day after tomorrow, but you'll have to make your French lawyers trot on a little quicker than I've ever known them to do if you expect to get everything settled in a fortnight."

"They're slow," he admitted with a smile, "but I'll show you the way they travel when a Scot who wants his money is cracking the whip behind them. Are you coming to dine with me tonight at the Club and then go on to a show?"

"Can't be done," I regretted.

"I'll ring you at the Mas des Roses at ten on Saturday morning, then. You're still in Lady Russell's villa, aren't you?"

He took his leave. My secretary looked at me reproachfully.

"You've bought another house."

I sighed blissfully. But such a house!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### *The Passing of a great Man*

PERHAPS the most humorous side of our purchase of the Domaine of Notre Dame developed on the last day but one before the actual completion. The arrangements by that time were all in the hands of the lawyers and notaries, and at eleven o'clock on the appointed morning a somewhat grotesque little procession shuffled out of the front entrance preceded by a slim, dapper little man in black clothes, the "legal representative of the vendor" as he announced himself. He turned and faced us as we crossed the road and entered the opposite field.

"Monsieur McNeill, Monsieur Phillips Oppenheim, Monsieur Woolrych and gentlemen," he began, "this morning we are proceeding to verify the boundaries of the estate known as the Domaine de Notre Dame which Monsieur McNeill is proposing to sell, and Monsieur Phillips Oppenheim to buy."

There were about fourteen of us altogether, including a sad-faced silent personage who wore a long black garment somehow suggesting a cleric and was, I believe, representing some half-forgotten claim the Church possessed to certain minor rights with regard to a footpath which traversed one of the woods. He did not once, however, open his mouth at any time during the proceedings and disappeared before their termination. Even Marc, who knew everything, was unable to explain him satisfactorily. "*Il est toujours ici,*" was the nearest explanation we could get as to his haunting presence. He made less noise than anyone and, notwithstanding how ill he was attired for such a task, he seemed always in the van,

unfatigued, and always, if he took a short-cut, coming out within a few yards of our destination.

It was one of the roughest scrambles I have ever undertaken even when I have walked with the beaters in the densest of Norfolk woods to shoot wary cocks who tried to avoid the doom ahead by running back under the bracken. The satisfactory accomplishment of the task of finding those overgrown and ancient stones, some of them deeply embedded in the clinging soil, was an exceedingly difficult matter. We had sometimes to use a scythe or reaping-hook and get down (some of us, not I) on our knees before we put the O.K. mark on the plan. My own lawyer I have never seen so energetic. He had started by wearing a very smart dove-coloured suit but he ended by carrying his coat and waistcoat and fanning himself with his hat.

Half-way through this strenuous morning, McNeill and I took a temporary rest seated upon the churchyard wall which commanded an excellent view of the park and the woods below. My wife, who is much more energetic than I, was in front with Marc all the way, and to this moment I am sure she has a sounder geographical knowledge of the estate than I have.

The inspection came to an end at last, but not before there was a further attempt by one of the company to prepare the ground for a little future trouble by disputing the ownership of a few yards of land concealed by brambles in the middle of the wood. As all access to these few yards, however, was impossible owing to the fact that the surrounding land, up to the last inch, was clearly owner-proven, the claim was brushed on one side, greatly to the disappointment of an old grey-bearded hanger-on carrying a long staff and of a singularly patriarchal appearance. Lack of access, my notary decided, would make any outside claim impossible. I heard afterwards that this little pantomime had taken place every time there had been a sale of the property during the last three or four hundred

years, and that the present claimant was the third of his family in direct line who had attended a sale in the vague hope of finding a listener to his grievance.

"Shall I offer him fifty francs and a bottle of country wine for the few inches of land so as to clear the matter up for all time?" I suggested to my lawyer, half in joke.

The latter was plainly terrified and drew me almost forcibly over to one side.

"For heaven's sake don't open your mouth," he begged. "That's what the old man and his nephew who's the idiot of the Commune come year after year hoping to hear. According to an almost forgotten statute of French law, if you make an offer of any sort, the claimant has a right to state a case."

"They couldn't win," I scoffed.

"Of course not, but there'd be costs and the side with any money would have to pay. That would be you."

I explained the matter to my wife a few minutes later. She kept me waiting until she had finished a little business with her sécateur and then looked down at the spot doubtfully.

"No buried treasure for you there, I'm afraid," she sighed.

"I like my treasure unburied," I replied politely.

"Shucks!"

Which little gem of American slang was all I got for my gallant speech, together with a tweak of the ear from a pair of very muddy fingers.

A little more than a week later I stopped the car in the middle of the village to allow a small funeral cortège to pass. It was almost the plainest I had ever seen, even the trappings of the pinewood coffin were worn and dingy and a child's nosegay of weeds and hedge-flowers was the sole decoration upon the pall. The few men and women plodding behind were of the poorest type. There was not in their downcast faces even a dull gleam of the hungry

expectation sometimes to be detected in the expressions of those about to receive a meal. The unseen corpse might well have been the corpse of a sad unloved. The eyes of the two women shambling patiently along were fixed all the time upon their dusty shoes. Even the child by their side barely glanced up to listen to the tolling of the bell. I sat with my hat in my hand until the procession had passed on and perhaps for a few seconds I was the only mourner, for its very squalor forced me to send a sorrowing thought across the road to the members of that dreary pilgrimage.

We were released at last from our melancholy waiting and I turned to Marc seated in the back. We were on our way, I remember, to purchase a few solitary hectares of land which possessed some water rights.

"A villager?" I asked.

"Old Gaspard, the claimant, they called him." Marc grinned. "Monsieur remembers him at the *promenade des limitations*. If he had lived a week or two longer he would have been up at the House offering to sell Monsieur his rough drawing of a secret passage up to the Church which starts under the salon. He would have asked you fifty francs for the plan and would have sworn by his mother's soul that the whole of the loot of the last Saracen raid on these parts was buried there."

"Do you believe that, Marc?" I enquired.

Marc assumed an expression which seemed sometimes to come quite naturally to him, the expression of an innocent and ignorant child.

"One knows nothing of those days, sir," he said.

The last act in this little drama of buying and selling, for so I had found it, took place on the following day at a notary's bureau in the middle of Nice. The place was a veritable hive of industry. Men, and women too, were hurrying about in all directions with their hands full of papers. There was none of the musty but dignified

deliberation one always associates with the offices of an English conveyancing lawyer. The *grand finale* occurred when McNeill and I, our lawyers and witnesses, were ushered into a large room which was evidently the holy of holies. Here there was a good deal of mumbling talk between our lawyers, and in the end, our signatures and my cheque. It was all over. McNeill, as though fearing we might change our minds, once more fled out of the place to catch the Blue Train.

My lawyer and I crossed the square, made our way to a suitable bar, and indulged in a whisky and soda, whilst my wife ate a solitary ice-cream at Vogade's, from which place I presently unearthed her. We drove back together in a somewhat stunned silence. It was my wife who made the suggestion which had been more than once on the tip of my tongue.

"Would it be much out of our way to drive round by the Domaine?" she asked tentatively.

"Not a yard," I replied; "let's do it. We can have a look at it with the light of ownership in our eyes."

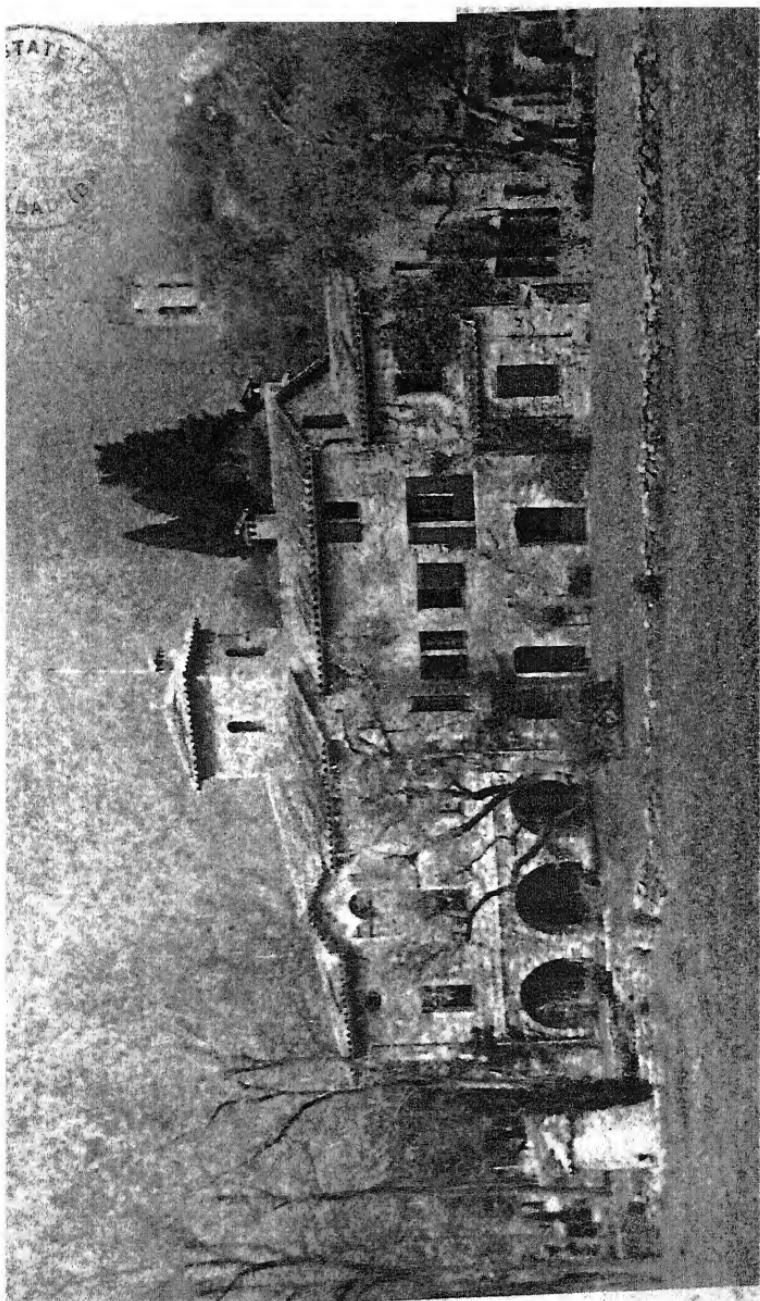
We were still staying at the time in the delightful little villa on the slopes of Mougins lent us by our dear friend, Elizabeth Russell, and only a mile or so away from the Domaine, so the slight detour was easily made. We drove slowly past the front entrance and up the rough road which led to the church on the summit of the hill and from there we looked down at our new property, now a very gay scene indeed as Darnley was giving a farewell tea-party.

"I think we ought to go in for a few minutes," my wife suggested.

I shook my head.

"Playing up ownership too soon," I told her. "Besides, Darnley hasn't told us yet when he wants to leave and I told him not on any account to hurry."

"You'll find a note when you get home. I asked





Marc at Nice and he says they've been busy packing for days. Darnley's moving out tomorrow."

"That settles it," I declared. "We shall go straight back to the Mas des Roses. I should feel like a ghoul wandering about here."

"You do get such strange ideas," my wife smiled as we settled down in the car once more.

Arrived at our destination, I went straight to the little doll's house of a library which Elizabeth Russell had built together with a miniature garden well away from the house where she did most of her work and where I had spent most of the last few months. The cable I was expecting was there. I saw the little green envelope on the top of several others and some letters on my desk. I am not a pessimist by nature but I felt my heart sink as I tore it open. It was from New York and it did not mince matters. The error of another man's ways had caused me a staggering but not of course annihilating financial misfortune.

I tore the cable into small pieces and made my way out into that little strip of garden and to my hostess's favourite chair to which she sometimes retired to study a knotty point in her stories. I had always felt something of her gentle influence lingering about the place, and it is quite certain that after the first few minutes I wasted no time in idle regrets. Something of that spirit of calm philosophy which I had always envied the mistress of this magic garden seemed to come to my own aid. I dealt with my letters, drafted the necessary cable to New York, and rang for my secretary. I went through the usual little formula.

"Ready to dictate," I announced, and we started work at once upon the sixth or seventh of the series of "Milan Grill Room" stories which I was writing at the time.

Financial matters soon demanded my presence in London and very reluctantly I took temporary leave of our new home. I met for the first time and with great

pleasure Mr. Curtis Brown of Curtis Brown and Company who ultimately became my agent, enjoyed his wonderful book *Contacts* and ate some very excellent lunches with him at the Devonshire Club.

That was a pleasant short time which I spent in London before joining my wife, who had gone down to Guernsey ahead of me to look out silver and linen and such other household necessities as we could spare from Le Vauquiedor for our new home. I went to the first night of Morgan's fine play *The Flashing Stream*, and I also saw another astonishing production, *Johnson Over Jordan*. I met a good many old friends with whom I had been a little out of touch. One of these was Newman Flower, who is now the owner of the fine old business of Cassells and who in the days when I saw more of him was editor of one of their most popular magazines, *The Storyteller*.

"I have a joke against you, my friend," he said, "which I have been longing to get off for a long time."

"Fire away," I begged. "I can stand it."

"It isn't flattering," he warned me.

"I should hate it if it was."

"Well, it concerns a man whom I think you will agree with me was one of our finest writers—Rudyard Kipling."

"I quite agree with you. But where do I come in?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," Flower went on. "The first time I ever met Kipling we began gossiping about some of the current publications, and he spoke to me about one of which I happened to be editor at the time.

"'I will tell you something, Newman Flower,' he said. 'I will tell you the name of the finest series of short stories you ever published.'

"'What was it?' I asked him.

"He confessed that he had forgotten the titles of the stories," Newman Flower continued. "There were ten stories and the author was a young man whose name was Oppenheim. 'The queer thing,' he went on 'is that

since the day I read that series I have never heard the author's name mentioned again. I often wondered what happened to him.' "

"I shall report this at once to my publishers, Hodder and Stoughton," I said with a grin. "I always tell them they make a mistake in keeping me so persistently off the bookstalls and never advertising my cheap editions!"

Also about this time I was able to revive some old associations at the Garrick Club. There was always a certain sadness to me, however, in the empty places one must expect to find in a rendezvous of that sort : the broken circle in the little gathering that one looked forward so eagerly to seeing in the small lounge round the fire on the ground floor—Gerald Duckworth with his severe smile and rather schoolmastery air which disappeared so suddenly when he heard a familiar voice and stretched out both hands with that familiar gesture of welcome ; E. V. Lucas with his mellifluous "Hello, Opp!" ; Alan Parsons with his bewildering smile and hearty grip. The next time I suppose it will be worse, for Henry Norman with his correct, pleasant voice, his delightful affability, will be no longer calling from his easy-chair. The two, however, whose friendly spirits have always made a visit to the Club like a homecoming are Godfrey Tearle and Sir Seymour Hicks, and those, thank heavens, are still there to remind us of old times. I always enjoy lunching, too, at the Savoy Grill Room, and I generally manage to get the second or third table on the right-hand side where I used to sit a great deal in the old days both for luncheon and dinner, and where I still feel very much at home and am nearly always likely to come across a genial Transatlantic acquaintance.

For a person who moved about a great deal, I enjoyed restaurant life, the bustle and glamour and the constant changefulness of it, the new faces, and the smile of pleasure in the welcome of the patron or leading *maître d'hôtel* when one came back to old haunts, especially since the dis-

appearance of the Embassy the most *intime* of them all. On the whole, however, I have spent most of my time in a very small circle of these—the Savoy Grill Room for luncheon, and Quaglino's for dinner on white-tie nights, have been my favourite haunts. There is a very small place in Shepherds Market, I believe it is a club really, which I always visit with pleasure. It is crowded and the decorations are grotesque but the proprietor always has the same pleasant smile and unfailing memory for one's weaknesses, and an excellent acquaintance with the best French vintages in some of the lesser known districts. Odd people go there, too. I remember at my last visit leaning across the tiny room to wave my hand to a Wimpole Street specialist who, for a doctor, has, I think, the most forbidding manner I ever remember but as an acquaintance and friend is a perfectly genial companion. Next to him was Grock, the famous clown, a man who has made me laugh more often than anyone else in his amiable but unusual profession.

The passing of the old Embassy was rather a blow to me. Luigi remains in my mind as the perfect prototype of a *maître d'hôtel* who was meant to be a *maître d'hôtel* from the cradle. He knew and understood men and women just as well as he understood the art of cooking and the vintages of wines. Then, after him, I liked Peter and equally well Peter's successor, Andrew. Both of them were overworked at the Embassy. Luigi could deal with the fashionable crowds who thronged the place but no one else ever possessed quite his finesse. I always think it was the over-popularity, the impossibility of dealing with the crowds who always wanted the same thing, which really was responsible for the downfall of the place. My last memory connected with it has just come curiously into my head. I had my favourite table for luncheon and was seated there one day when on the other side of the room I found Edgar Wallace with his wife. We exchanged far-away greetings and I pointed him out to my companion. Presently an American young lady was brought

up by Peter, who was in charge then, in search of an autograph. I pointed out Edgar Wallace across the room and she was enchanted.

"Do take me over," she begged, "I'd love to have both your autographs on the same menu."

I excused myself to my companion for a minute or two and went over. Edgar Wallace, as usual, was brimming over with good-nature. He added a bright little sentence to the autograph and we lingered, talking for a time.

"This is an occasion," he told us. "It is my farewell luncheon with my wife before leaving for Hollywood."

Somehow or other, and I am sure it was not jealousy, I felt sorry to hear that he was going to Hollywood,—to which place I have never received any definite invitation. It did not seem to me that the atmosphere there would suit him. However, there was nothing to be done but accept the cordial invitation which followed and send over for my luncheon companion. We settled down to drink Edgar's health. The American young lady presently flitted away and apparently told half the roomful and showed her autographs to so many friends that, for the next half-hour, we were both busy signing menus.

"This old veteran," Edgar Wallace told one of the girls, alluding to me, "is still half a million words or so ahead of me with his accursed cheap editions, but I'll have caught him up when I've written all the stories I shall collect in Hollywood."

"Take my advice and write them over here," I urged him.

"Whatever have you got against the place?" he demanded.

I had been on the point of taking my leave but I sat down again.

"Listen," I said, "to a tale of woe confided to me only a week or so ago. There's a short-story writer whom you and I both know very well, by name at any rate. He is a clever man and a successful one and he told me this story

as a joke against himself. First of all, let me tell you where I met him. It was a very romantic spot, I can promise you, and I don't know many men in the world I would have taken the risk of landing from my boat with a north-east gale blowing, just for the sake of an hour or so's conversation. He was staying with that very attractive lady, the Dame de Sark, at the Seigneurie in Sark. We decided afterwards, however, that it had been quite worth while taking the risk, for we found him a very delightful raconteur and a most interesting man. This was one of the most recent experiences of his which, although the joke was somewhat against himself, he told with dry and abundant humour. I shan't tell you his name because the story is an intensely personal one, but you will hear all about it when you get over there."

"Go ahead," Edgar begged, "I'm interested, especially if he has been in the States lately."

"He's not only been in the States," I confided, "but he went to Hollywood to write short stories and they made a great fuss of him. He paid his call upon the great man of the Company who had solicited his presence and, after one or two delays, was warmly received.

"'I guess we're going to keep you busy, Mr. A. B.,' the film magnate told him, 'yours is just the stuff we can use. We've got a batch of ideas here,' he went on, sorting out rapidly a few manuscripts from a pile on the table; 'take these away, will you, and draft me out a rough scenario of the ones marked Number One and Number Seven. Get to work tomorrow if you can. You'll find a studio waiting for you and a first-class secretary-stenographer.'

"The author took the scripts, exchanged a few brief amenities with this Napoleon of the studio and hurried away. In less than a week he had completed the task, and he sent the scripts round to the Director with his compliments and a few remarks. He received no immediate acknowledgement, so, meeting the great man on the follow-

ing day getting into his car at the main entrance, he accosted him.

"Did you get those scenarios I sent round, Mr. Hyman?" he enquired.

"There was a certain vagueness about Mr. Hyman's smile of greeting and subsequent handshake.

"'A. B. is my name, you know,' the author explained. 'I sent you round two scripts yesterday.'

"The great man wrung his hand. 'Why, sure, Mr. A. B.!' he declared. 'Sure, I got them! Great stuff, sir! Just what we're looking for! Excuse me now, I'm in a hurry, but tomorrow we'll have a conference and I'll send round for you.'

"Any particular time?"

"My secretary will phone through," the other replied, stepping into his car with a farewell wave of the hand.

The next day A. B. turned up at the studio in high spirits. He made his way to his office, opened the door a little abruptly, and found a young man, a perfect stranger, dictating letters from his desk to a strange young lady. The former apparently was somewhat annoyed.

"Say, whom are you looking for?" he asked.

"This happens to be my office," A. B. replied, a little curtly.

"It is nothing of the sort," was the reply; "look outside, you'll find my card there. Get along, there's a good fellow, I have a pile of letters to finish before eleven o'clock."

A. B. in a towering rage slammed the door and walked to the end of the corridor, carrying the card in his hand. He appealed to the uniformed page seated behind the desk.

"Look here," he said, "someone has got my office and has stuck his own card outside."

The page stared at the card he held between his finger and thumb and glanced down the list of names on a sheet pinned to the table.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"‘A. B.’ was the curt reply. ‘I’m working here for the Company. An office was allotted to me several days ago.’

“‘A. B.’ the page repeated, shaking his head. ‘Gosh, that’s too bad. Didn’t you know? You’re fired! ’

“There was no mistake about it. A. B., on application to the head office, was handed a polite note together with the two scripts regretting that the latter were unsuitable and that the studio was unable to make use of his services for the present.”

Everyone laughed. Edgar stretched out his arm and felt his biceps.

“I guess they won’t treat me like that,” he declared with a grin.

Perhaps they did not, yet to those who were fond of the man and appreciated the really delightful side of him, there will always be a slight feeling that our friends in California were not too kind to him. He was not in the best of health, of course, during the whole of his time there, and he was perhaps unlucky in the fact that few of the people who happened to be round in Hollywood at the time were amongst his intimate friends. Climate or no climate, I don’t think we should have allowed him to slip away from over here, notwithstanding our fogs and mists. Nevertheless, speculations of that sort are useless. I can only say that we miss him. All his friends miss him. So, I imagine, do his publishers.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### *Christmas at Notre Dame*

IT took us an exceedingly short time to settle down in our new home at Notre Dame. A portion of the old Mairie, which was on the estate but which had not been used officially for some years, was transformed into an abode for my secretary, my wife entered happily into possession of her new sleeping quarters regardless of their historical impropriety, and I was equally happy in a bedroom of considerable size with casement windows protected by an ancient grille, with a rafted roof, a huge key and a bathroom, the portion of which intended for my reclining body being fashioned out of an immense block of black stone and flanked with an enormous partially illegible slab bearing the date of 1471 which I believe really was dug up on the premises.

It is a curious fact, however, and due without a doubt to the long-headedness of Charlie McNeill when he first bought the property and decided to renovate it, that, whilst the rooms themselves were undeniably ancient, all the toilette appurtenances are amongst the most modern of their kind, and it is very seldom that anything connected with them is out of order. The supply of water upon the estate is abundant although, at the advice of the factotum Marc, I bought a few acres of woodland several kilometres away which possessed water rights connected with our own. Even in the driest summer I fancy we should be fairly secure against drought. Of course, all my young friends, directly they saw the place, clamoured for a swimming-pool, but I put them off on the score of expense. As a matter of fact, I have myself not the slightest taste for

fresh-water bathing. I like my bathe in the sea in the morning even if I have to go some distance for it, but after any form of afternoon or evening exercise I find a bath-tub and shower quite good enough.

It is the trees alone which remind me when I look out after my morning ablutions that I am not in England. The meadowland below, stretching away to the distant plantation of firs, might well be part of a small park in an ancient English home, but the trees, instead of being full-blooded oaks or stately elms, are silver-grey olive trees with gnarled trunks, cedars with their restless branches—

Oh, art thou sighing for Lebanon, dark cedars,  
In that long breeze which streams to thy delicious east ?—

or tall and melancholy cypresses, grim custodians through the night of the lovely sleeping world. Clusters of acacias lend brightness to the scene, and the dense woods on my left and across the road are mostly composed of various varieties of pines. There are a few flowering shrubs. Rhododendrons do not flourish here, but in the meadows and in the thick undergrowth of woods there is a wonderful wealth of wild flowers. Nearly all the *sauvage* variety of cultivated plants is represented, and in many cases these are more delectable in form and perfume than their legitimate ancestors. There are autumn crocuses, greatly treasured by my wife, and there is an infinite diversity in the elusive but plentiful wild orchises.

Certainly, although we both missed the many days of rough shooting which were part of our Norfolk life, this was one of the happiest autumns and early winters we had ever spent. Perhaps the milder form of recreation offered by the golf-links at Cagnes-sur-Mer and the Country Club at Cannes was more suitable to our advancing years, and my wife, with her easy adaptability of disposition, never showed any signs of regretting those happy hours of rough shooting with a few friends, the skilfully thought-out part-

ridge drives, and the finish up of the pheasant covers where a few woodcock still lingered, which were the joy of our more vigorous days. That was really a very pleasant autumn and early winter. My son-in-law, my daughter and my grandson spent most of it with us, and the latter was allowed to go out into the woods and choose his own Christmas tree, which, of course, gave him unbounded pleasure. He cut a little notch in it early in November and, after that, most days his governess had to arrange a walk somehow or other in that direction so that he could give it a little pat and be sure it was keeping in good condition. Not that I really believe children have any faith in Santa Claus ; I believe they think they are just humouring us when they listen to our stories and witness our clumsy mummer's antics. However, the festival when it arrived on this last occasion was a great success—Christmas tree, presents, morning golf and all.

Christmas morning we spent in a very pleasurable fashion. We drove round to see a few friends, sedulously avoiding any households in which cocktails were likely to be too zealously pressed. We, that is my wife and daughter, son-in-law and John, arrived at Cagnes Golf Club in time for a little friendly golf and afterwards followed the custom we had established a good many years previously. We lunched in the very excellent restaurant attached to the Club and presided over by Serraire Junior, and his wife, with Serraire Senior, as chef. The Golf Club at Cagnes is a very pleasant rendezvous where Nice and Cannes meet once a year in the happy rivalry of a golf match and many other times for friendly games. No more popular sporting official exists on the Riviera today than the Secretary, Captain Alan Rattigan. It is chiefly out of compliment to him that a great many of the Riviera-ites have established the custom of lunching there on Christmas morning, and I don't think I have ever missed it when in this part of the world.

A few toasts and speeches and then home. The afternoon, such part of it as remained, was given over as usual to the children. Unfortunately there were very few of them in our part of the world. John himself was Master of Ceremonies and, being brimful of self-confidence, enjoyed himself. Then there were the two Buzzard children, Katerina and her elder sister, Elizabeth, together with their parents, Colonel and Mrs. Buzzard. We seniors busied ourselves by putting the finishing touches to the tree, and when it was all lit up we formed a circle round it. Sir Henry and Lady Norman, who were staying on to dine, and Elizabeth Russell, who, alas, was dining elsewhere but who had come over to bring Christmas wishes and household presents, joined us. I shall never forget a brief conversation I had with Elizabeth Russell, who always took a gloomy prospect as regards the future of her own work. She declared herself incapable of finishing a novel on which she was engaged and talked about putting it on one side altogether. I asked her about the American production, and she looked up at me with those strange expressive eyes of hers filled with anxiety.

"America doesn't seem to like my books, Phillips," she complained, a trifle pathetically.

I mentioned the name of my publishers and told her of our long and delightful connection. She seemed interested but still despondent. In a literary paper I came across a few weeks ago I see that this novel concerning which she was in trouble has headed the list of best-sellers in America several times since its publication, has never been altogether absent from those hallowed columns, and her publishers are even now announcing the sale of about two hundred thousand copies.

Notre Dame is a house especially suitable for Christmas entertaining, and we romped about with games and a little dancing until nearly midnight. By that time John was despatched to bed, the Buzzard children were getting

weary, and Henry Norman, although he had been dancing with vigour and dancing was one of his accomplishments, was a little tired. We had a last drink together and talked of the New Year. I am bound to say that his outlook was far from being cheerful. In every country in Europe he seemed to foresee possibilities of trouble, and for the first time I found him taking a really despondent view of European affairs. In my efforts to restore the Christmas spirit, I was driven to trying my hand at manufacturing a rum punch in a huge silver bowl which I had won in far-distant days at golf. The punch was excellent. All except Fay Norman confessed to that semi-somnolent condition which precedes the gentle intoxication of a well-spent Christmas. We parted cheerfully and shouted farewells and all sorts of wishes as the lights of the cars went flashing down the avenue. That was the end of Christmas 1938.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### *The Thunderbolt falls*

SO now, treading a little gingerly, I come to that year of fate, 1939. It opened pleasantly enough, notwithstanding the return to some extent of an old complaint from which I suffered through many English winters—bronchial catarrh—and which I had so far completely escaped in the South of France. I was able to play a short morning round of golf, however, enjoy many of Lady Trent's cheerful luncheons and *thés dansants*, entertain friends now and then at the Country Club, now and then at the Domaine de Notre Dame, and pass along my way with a reasonable amount of cheerfulness. My wife, who had a queer penchant for Guernsey, was forced to admit that the golf here at Mougins and the climate were both infinitely superior to that of our island home. Our family was still in the vicinity and were frequently to be met with at these slight social functions and on the golf-course, and John with his governess found many opportunities for excursions through the woods of Notre Dame and picnics with his grandmother. One of our earliest visitors this year was a delightful young girl novelist, Miss Noel Streatfeild, who has written some charming children's stories and a couple of very readable novels. The children's stories found a great success in America, and I have no doubt will do so for years to come. She stayed with us for a time and enjoyed the climate and life so much that she took a flat at Juan-les-Pins, settled down with her secretary, and did some steady work there. Occasionally when my wife found the motor ride at night a little fatiguing she occupied one of the two stalls I always took for the

Monte Carlo Opera season. We were both keen on Wagner and we thoroughly enjoyed the curtailed production of *The Ring*. Both *Siegfried* and *The Twilight of the Gods* were finely given, and though the Monte Carlo stage is small everything seems most skilfully worked out in proportion to its dimensions.

Our next visitor was Colonel Frederick Brusson, State Secretary of Guernsey, and his handsome wife who was very much admired in Monte Carlo. They were a devoted, picturesque and domesticated couple, highly popular in Guernsey and a success with everyone they met over here. Both enjoyed a little gamble, both were excellent bridge-players, and they were always ready to dance with spirit until the small hours of the morning. We thoroughly enjoyed their visit and went to bed at half-past nine for three nights following their departure. They were the easiest couple in the world to entertain though neither played golf. Eileen Brusson was devoted, however, to the shops that lined the Croisette, and Freddy, her husband, liked nothing better than a good walk through the woods and the ring of a cocktail-shaker at the end. Very soon after their departure other friends from Guernsey arrived — Colonel Sherbrooke, who commanded the battalion of Sherwood Foresters stationed there, and his wife, who was rather by way of being a rival beauty to Eileen Brusson in our island home. The Sherbrookes came on to us from Lady Trent's where they had been paying a short visit, and they had already met a great many of our neighbours. The Colonel is a fine athlete, plays excellent golf, the tennis of a man ten years his junior and "any other game that is going," as he used cheerfully to confide. They, too, liked their little gamble and enjoyed a visit to Monte Carlo, and they were just as pleasant to entertain as their predecessors. Somehow or other it has always seemed to me that Army people are the easiest to get on with of any in the world. They do all the usual

things, they have no cranky notions and they are always ready to look round the corner if there is anything worth seeing.

After the Sherbrookes' departure came Alfred Tennyson and his wife. Alfred, it seemed to me, was growing more and more like his grandfather, picturesque, good-looking in a strange appealing way, with, as Elizabeth Russell remarked the first time she met him, a beautiful speaking voice. His wife, too, has personality : trim, elegant in figure, exceedingly self-possessed, and perpetually smiling when talking to her husband as though she thoroughly enjoyed the humour of being married to anyone so dissimilar in tastes and appearance. Alfred's golf was as crushing as ever, and he reminded me once more on our first round at Mougins of the famous occasion when Arnold Read and I won the Douglas Read Foursome Cups from Alfred and his brother on the seventeenth green at Sheringham. We had some very good matches, but although the links at Mougins were easy and exceedingly pleasant to play over, I never cared for more than nine holes. Alfred had lost, too, much of his early enthusiasm for the game and preferred an early lunch, an hour with *The Times*, and three or four hours at the Casino before dinner. Both he and his wife played roulette with great seriousness, and she, I believe, with a certain amount of success. They were very pleasant visitors, and we parted from them with regret and with the understanding that Alfred should return later on in the season and bring with him their sailor son who at that time was doing very well in the Service.

After the Tennysons' departure our old friend P. G. Wodehouse turned up for a brief stay in the neighbourhood, and we saw a good deal of him. Our nearest neighbour, Lord Darnley, who had built a house two kilometres away from us, had always been anxious to meet him so I arranged a luncheon party which was really, after all, more like a small London affair than a Riviera gathering, the

guests including Tottie and Frynn Harwood, who came on to stay with us a few days later, Somerset Maugham and the Countess Russell—"Elizabeth" of world repute, now alas only a beautiful shadow in our lives. Tottie and Frynn, whom we both love, spent only a few days with us, but very strenuous days they were. They loved the golf, or rather he did, and Frynn loved everything else there was to do, especially the gambling. Tottie Harwood has always seemed to me rather a mystery with his terrific jaw, exceedingly virile appearance and pleasant sense of humour. He is invariably a delightful companion, and his plays, especially *The Man in Possession*, always give me the utmost pleasure, as I have mentioned before, yet he has never filled the place he deserves in the dramatic world. I think he was led away by the films at one period in his life, although, of course, he had a reasonable amount of success with these, as he had quite deservedly with everything he touched. But he never seemed to bring off one of those great popular successes which count for so much in the career of an author or playwright. The last time I saw him—this is chronologically a few months out of order—I was bidden to a simple dinner, to arrive at the rendezvous for which I had to climb over a perfect mountain of sandbags and I stumbled into the half-lit restaurant—the Coq d'Or in Stratton Street—giving a very fair imitation of the intoxicated late-comer. Harwood had a guest whom he was anxious for me to meet, Beverley Baxter, whose conversation was worth the whole of the journey from the South of France. He was a great journalist even before he took up Parliamentary life, and, although he seems temporarily to have disappeared from the limelight, I feel certain he is still doing great work.

To return to those marvellous days, I am afraid that Tottie Harwood's last visit to the Riviera was not one of his most pleasant reminiscences. He had only a moderately good season at roulette, at which I have never before seen him lose, a slight trouble with his knee spoilt his golf for

half the time, and he never seemed to find enough time to do any settled work. Fynn, better known, perhaps, as Tennyson Jesse, was a great favourite as usual and loved the small parties that were always going on and the wearing of pretty frocks at which she is an adept.

Mrs. Norman Smith, the wife of one of my old shooting companions, also turned up about this time for a few days on the way home from Valescure and left behind her a delightful legacy in the shape of a particularly attractive water-colour of the cedars bordering the Abbess's garden. Darnley, who was himself no mean artist, greatly admired it, and she promised him a replica when she came down next season. Alas for that next season !

Early in July we returned to Guernsey with the intention of spending the summer there. We spent a few days in London, where I had another pleasant lunch with Curtis Brown at the Devonshire Club. He told me many interesting anecdotes of past connections, which seemed to include most of the giants of fiction. He had, however, no good news for me. His American house had failed to sell the serial rights of the second novel I had sent along, the magazine market in England seemed to have completely collapsed, and owing to some disputes which I have never properly understood, my French translators and publishers had ceased buying my stories. We went on down to Le Vauquiedor, where we arrived to find the skies grey, rain falling and the lunatic asylum, which a kindly Committee of Estates had decided to build in an adjoining field to my house, well on its way to completion. My family—Geraldine, my daughter, Nowell Downes, my son-in-law, and John, my grandson—arrived very shortly after and we spent such days as the weather made possible on my boat, fishing (the weather never seemed to become settled enough to contemplate long cruises), or playing golf in mackintoshes in the morning and attending cocktail parties in the afternoon. The Guernsey people are, generally speaking, a very attractive crowd socially

and they are devoted to cocktail parties, which they give with the most charming and invincible pertinacity. I enjoyed the first half-dozen or so immensely, for I rather like meeting agreeable people myself, but in very few cases indeed was there the slightest variation in the form of entertainment. One just stood about and talked, and even those who had tennis courts kept them for the more expert youngsters. Any other form of amusement seemed unknown. When my turn came to entertain for the first time it seemed to me that I had committed a sort of sin in engaging a small orchestra and inviting my guests to dance. To dance before the lights were lit seemed to some of them in a way sacrilegious, and the first time, soon after our arrival on the island, save for the energies of the Governor and his small house-party, the thing would have been a flop. In the two succeeding years, however, the idea caught on and a putting competition with a variety of prizes was also a success. I think that some of the old professional conversationalists rather resented the changes which newcomers brought into the island, but their differences of opinion are now happily, or unhappily, settled.

One thing about our fishing which was really enjoyable and to a certain extent unusual so far as my earlier experiences had gone, was that we caught fish. None of the local fishermen made the slightest objection to our putting down lobster-pots in their waters, and when mackerel were in there were enough fish in the sea for everyone. We still averaged half a dozen to a dozen lobsters every time we went out and generally a conger-eel or two, a fair number of whiting and, of course, if the mackerel were in at all, thirty or forty was a very moderate catch. There was not much variety, but to eat fish straight from the sea is in itself a luxury.

The particular summer of which I am writing was very much like the preceding ones except that the atmosphere was a little darkened by everyone's growing apprehension

as to political disaster. As usual, however, we did very little about it and drifted on until that unforgettable Sunday morning in September. I remember Telfer-Smollett, our very charming and popular Governor, with Mrs. Brusson and myself were out in the boat off Herm, fishing somewhat lackadaisically, for Guernsey is exceedingly Sabbatical in its instincts, when the news came. We made our way back at once, landed the Governor, and ate a somewhat dismal luncheon on board. It was the dawn of strange days.

Dreaded and detestable days. I had lost only a few months before a dear friend, Sir Henry Norman, and for the second time in my life was faced with what to a restless civilian must be one of the hardest things to bear—the grim encircling cloud of a war in which, however much he may resent it, he is only able to serve his country to a very limited extent.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### *Pandemonium at the Carlton*

THE next morning I took the boat for England and spent a very agitated week, mostly in Malet Street, the Club, and calling upon various old friends to discuss the situation. I returned to Guernsey convinced that there was no useful work for me at present in Malet Street beyond the roving commission which I had always held. My previous post at the Norfolk Street Ministry seemed unlikely to exist in the future, as the neutral journalists were being taken care of in an entirely different manner, and so far as propaganda was concerned my suggestion that the only man in history or fiction who had shown the makings of a true propaganda-writer was Mark Antony had been scouted. In fact, I found myself out of sympathy with most of the modern ideas.

I have always hated propaganda as it is usually understood in this country, and I hated it more than ever when I sat down at home to think the position over. Nine-tenths of the propaganda in the world is like a poisonous weed growing in a garden of flowers which would have grown to beauty by themselves by natural means, the warmth of the sun and the care of a skilled horticulturist, but which, with the new methods of artificial manure, forcing-houses and drugs, was doomed. There was nothing to be done about it, however. I was not of an age nor had I the influence to start a new campaign, so I made what, I suppose, I must look upon as the one great mistake of my life—I decided to go over to Notre Dame to collect the manuscripts and many small articles of value which I had left there in a somewhat promiscuous fashion,

also to close the house and bid a temporary farewell to our very excellent steward who looked after the two Domaines, Darnley's and mine.

We started in my Wolseley automobile from Jersey and we had an uneventful journey in beautiful weather, keeping well to the west so as not to interfere with any military movements that might be developing, but we came across very few signs of the coming upheaval. We were five in number—my wife, my secretary, Miss Symes, Marcel, a Swiss *maître d'hôtel*, and Hill, the chauffeur, a Guernsey man, which island was outside English military jurisdiction and who belonged simply to the militia of the island, a small defence corps corresponding more with the English volunteers of the old régime. Our first taste of the unusual, except that we found some of the hotels unusually empty, was at Lyons, where an *alerte* sounded just as we were starting out from the hotel. We were delayed an hour for no apparent reason, and about thirty miles southwards we were stopped again and had to remain until the afternoon packed amongst a long line of vehicles a kilometre or so in length. However, that was all we saw of anything unusual. We reached Notre Dame a day late and found most of our friends only just beginning to realise the stupendous catastrophe with which the world was threatened. We decided to remain where we were for the immediate present for somewhat selfish reasons, perhaps, but reasons which at the time seemed good ones. The season turned out to be extremely severe, in fact I never remember a colder one, even in England. We had a Battery quartered in our neighbourhood and sixty or seventy horses to be fed and watered in our small park every day. Our outhouses were filled and, of course, the water supply was difficult. However, we thought it best to remain on the spot, and it was certainly very much to the advantage of the soldiers themselves that we did so. A wonderful system of voluntary canteens was working in the neighbourhood, looked after by several very ener-

getic American ladies and Lady Fortescue, our neighbour, who wrote beautiful and appealing letters on the sufferings of some of the men in the rougher regions which produced much sympathy and were responsible for many subscriptions. Our own district, however, was just on the outside edge of the chain of *foyers*, and my wife in one of her morning walks round the place found some of the men in a state of inconceivable discomfort, writing letters out of doors and suffering a great deal from the cold. We decided to run a *foyer* for them ourselves as my secretary had developed war fever and left us a few weeks before, so we turned the Mairie, which I had made over to her as a temporary residence, into a *foyer*, furnished it roughly, provided a gramophone, literature of a sort, stationery and, what they appreciated most I think, hot coffee or cocoa at five o'clock every day. We kept the place all the time heated, the men showed every sign of gratitude, my wife received decorations from two of the officers connected with the Battery, and the helping with the arrangements made me all the more reconciled to staying down in the district. I had many talks with the men, which left an indelible impression upon my memory but which have no place in these memoirs. With the management of the estate, the purchase and regulation of supplies, my wife left me to my work and took the whole of the responsibility on her shoulders. It kept her very busy but it was certainly a task worth while, and we neither of us had a moment's regret for the time and labour given to it.

Alcohol, of course, was not permitted in a general way, but on Christmas Day we were allowed to make a small exception and some hot grog was served round which was much appreciated. We ourselves had contrived to secure a turkey and, what was more important than that, our dear neighbour, Lady Fortescue, was able to come to us for dinner. Our resident officer, of course, was available, so with the Buzzards and two other officers from the Battery, together with our own house party—Geraldine,

Nowell and John had arrived a few days previously—we made up quite a gathering. John approved of the Christmas tree, his own choice again, and he and his father both did their best to create an atmosphere suitable to the season. It was a little difficult but our soldier friends played up, there were sounds of merriment all the time from the servants' quarters, and we did our best. So passed the Christmas of 1939. We parted feeling that regarding the 1940 celebration of the same festival there hung a grave cloud of doubt and depression.

The months rolled on. The snows melted and the tentative call of spring began to make itself felt. Ugly incidents were happening and looming all the while in the foreground, and we began to feel that this was the time for each one to get home ; my daughter in particular was beginning to get restless, travel was becoming difficult, we ourselves were packing up and preparing to leave, and with Nowell, Geraldine and John well looked after by mutual friends and with the understanding that they could, if they chose, on reaching England go to our home in Guernsey instead of to their cottage in Kent, in which former place we were planning to start a communal household, if it seemed advisable.

Alas, since that morning in June when in rapid succession we said farewell to my daughter Geraldine, to John, to Nowell my son-in-law, and to my junior secretary, I had not set eyes upon one of them for many months. Letters faded away, messages became scanty, and at last ceased altogether. The chill moratorium of war set its hand upon our hearts.

Our final task was now upon us. We had assisted the younger generation in their departure, taken leave of our guests and many of our friends. All that remained was to remove ourselves and a few of our more valued possessions. My wife, as usual, was quite wonderful in making her

preparations, but we could do nothing quick enough to keep pace with the march of events. We made all the arrangements possible with Marc, the steward, for the care of the Domaine, we got a special grant of petrol from the Maire, and Anna, my wife's maid, and Hill, the Guernsey chauffeur, my wife and myself, all started off hopefully for St. Malo and raced away by the route judged to be quite safe for another seven or eight days. We slept the first night at Aix-en-Provence, and were horrified to find the hotel nearly filled with people turned back from the northern ports in their various attempts to leave the country. We had one brief but joyous meeting with Léon Radziwill, who we were told had been shot in Poland and who by some strange means had found his way here with his wife. We had not time to listen to their story, however, as we had to make all our plans for getting away before daylight the next morning, if possible. The Rothbands, too, were there, old Monte Carlo-ites, and Lady Rothband was quite ready to settle down to a rubber of bridge if anyone had suggested it, but Sir Henry was nervous. I drank a whisky and soda with him and then went off for an uneasy hour or two of sleep.

We started in the grey light of morning, but we were warned before we left town that we would be sent back. We stuck at it, however, and even got within fifty or sixty kilometres of St. Malo when the worst happened. We were within the sound of the guns now, close to Rennes, the famous military centre. There the road was barricaded, and although we carried papers and *laissez-passers* without number we could get no further. The enemy, we were told, were already shelling St. Malo. We tried a side road with the vague idea of making for a smaller port on the western coast, but this time we were nearly placed under arrest. We turned back reluctantly because I think we had some premonition of what this merciless waiting must cost us. I decided to try for Bordeaux, and after a few hours' sleep we retraced our steps and let fly for

all we were worth. I don't think we could have made a worse choice of any temporary shelter or hiding-place. The roads to Bordeaux were guarded, as we knew afterwards, more strongly than any main road leading westward. This time we had only the military to deal with and they were a great deal less flexible than the gendarmes. One of them rode with us on the step of the car to the military post to see that we turned back, and we were obliged to abandon the struggle. We returned to Aix-en-Provence, slept another night there discussing wild schemes for escape with perfect strangers, and the next morning, after a brief talk with the head of the military authorities who very courteously drew a little map for us and showed us how completely hemmed in we were, we made our sorrowful way back to Brignolles. Here we rested, dined and slept in sad but friendly surroundings. I say "sad" because we had so often lingered here for lunch in the gardens on our way backwards and forwards and I had written several stories in which the place figures.

"Monsieur Oppenheim ! Monsieur Philippe Oppenheim !" I heard our host of the hotel say once to a small gathering of wine-tasters who were lunching at the next table. "It is he you see there. I do not advertise my hotel, I do not advertise my wines, it is Monsieur who writes of me in his books. That is what brings tourists !"

Alas, my vineyard owner and hotel proprietor, shall I ever pass your way light-heartedly again, I wonder ?

In the morning we went sorrowfully back to Cannes. I drove first to the Consul's office, where pandemonium reigned. A notice was placarded upon the walls advising all English people to quit the neighbourhood at once. I was told at the Consulate that the British Admiralty were sending two ships to take off all the English who wished to return and that they would probably arrive in twenty-four hours. I entered all our names and, so as not to be out of call, we went only so far as the Carlton, where we

found dozens of others waiting to embark on the same enterprise. We little knew that we were doomed to be the inmates of that caravanserai for three months.

The place was a hotbed of rumours, so was the Consul's office, so was every bar and hotel lining the Croisette. The two ships were battleships, they were to be escorted, there was to be no escort, they were not battleships but freighters, they would be in tonight, they would not be in for a week—what a hubbub it was ! We kept our heads and waited. We declined to join any exciting debates after dinner at the Carlton and, as we were already pretty well worn out, we went to bed early. In the morning we knew the worst. Two miserable-looking junks which had just completed their task of landing a cargo of coal had arrived from the north coast of Africa without having stopped to clean up or take on stores to accomplish the task of taking two thousand people back to England. There was no water on board and practically no food, and they were due to start the journey to England at midnight.

The proposition seemed incredible ; however, we made all our preparations in solemn and significant silence. We had packages made of such provisions as we could purchase, a bottle or two of wine and a flask of brandy, and hours before the time we drove down to the quay, for our luggage must pass the Customs examination. My wife and I were spared this, however, so we sat in the car whilst the maid, and Hill, the chauffeur, guarded our share of the wild and jumbled heaps of baggage with which everyone was crowding the quays. There must have been quite three thousand people round the harbour to commence with, a number which gradually instead of increasing began to decline. A great many, perhaps, came as sightseers ; a great many took one look at the two hulks, black and sinister in the blistering heat, and turned their backs on them. Others remained in doubt, the prey to a babel of rumours and information. I was one of those.

A man who actually owned a yacht, Rodney Soher, put his head in at the car window.

"You're not thinking of going with that circus, are you?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "I want to get back to England. What about your yacht?"

For just a moment he seemed to hesitate and I had wild dreams.

"How many of you are there?" he asked.

"My wife, myself and two servants," I told him.

"Too many," he answered, with a shake of his head.

"Sorry."

"The servants will gladly work their passage," I told him.

"It isn't that," he replied. "I have too many of that class of passenger already."

"I will pay anything you like to ask me," I told him desperately, hoping he might say £100 each or so.

He shook his head. "Money isn't any object," he declared. "It's the numbers I have to consider. I'll let you know."

He slipped away and my heart sank. There was something final about that "let you know." I subsequently heard that he took only one more passenger—a young lady, an acquaintance whom he only came across at the last moment.

How in the hours afterwards I hated him and her! Well, we continued to hear more facts about these steamers whilst we awaited our turn at the luggage examination. They were admittedly coal hulks, and as yet the decks had not been cleaned since they had discharged their cargo. In the entire ship to which we were consigned there were only two lavatories, one fore and one aft, and there were already five hundred people on board. There was no sort of accommodation for washing, not a single cabin, everyone had to sleep on deck, the decks were practically open, and I saw three women carried off fainting in the

heat of the sun and from other reasons even while I prowled round.

"What do you think about it?" I asked my chauffeur.

He shook his head grimly. "I don't know, sir," he admitted.

"What about you?" I asked the maid.

"It's horrible on board, sir," she replied. "I went on for a minute."

"Horrible on board" was a glowing description of conditions so far as we could see them. All was unclean, ill-found, and the fact that they would ever reach London at all with four or five hundred people aboard seemed exceedingly unlikely, apart from the fact that there was no information as to protection for them or convoy of any sort. I asked my wife what she would do and she left it to me. I thought there might be a faint chance of persuading Soher to take us, and we also remembered what everyone was saying on the quay, that there would be plenty of other chances of getting home, and I finally decided against the trip. I have bitterly regretted it many times since. It would have been fourteen days of sheer agony, for the conditions were just as bad as pictured, but if we had lived through it we should have ended in London or some part of England, and that is what so many times during many dreary days in the months to follow we all lamented.

When he reached London, Somerset Maugham, who was travelling alone, gave on the radio what I believe to be a fair description of the ship. All the conditions which I have mentioned were true and, experienced traveller though he is, he admitted that it was the worst voyage he had ever had. Seven people died on the voyage and five went out of their minds. A good many others were practically carried off in a state of collapse, yet there has never been a day since that I have not regretted not taking the risk.

Well, we drove back to the Carlton and we stayed on there for a time so as to be on hand and not miss any possible chance of getting away. Everyone we met wanted to shake hands and congratulate everybody else on staying, but I think secretly most of them felt as we did. In the absence of definite news the rumour-mongers' field period began, and they made devastating use of it. Things went badly enough, as we discovered from the radio, and the situation in Cannes during the ensuing days was more like a panorama of lunacy. First of all—it is not a pleasant thing to confess but it is nevertheless the truth—our Consuls from Cannes and Nice and further along the coast had absolutely disappeared. No form of established authority was left, no official who could give advice, no facts on which one could pin one's faith. Several amateurs had taken on the job of helping the frenzied crowds in Cannes and Nice get away. They organised trains which never started, other trains left but the passengers were turned back without crossing a single frontier. There were still others who crossed one frontier but were forbidden further progress and had to stay in parts of the country where new regulations existed and where money dripped away like water. The only man in whom anyone might have had any faith and who might have done things for us all was Sir Coleridge Kennard, but after all, between diplomatic posts and consular ones there is a broad gulf and he lacked technical experience of the various moves, notwithstanding his efforts, for which many people owe him a debt of gratitude.

Then came another burst of enthusiasm for trains. Someone was reported to have got through and tickets were sold again for a train to Lisbon via Madrid. Then it was found that francs were running short, no one had any money. Foolishly, just at that time I had a fair amount of francs and did not properly understand what the difficulties were going to be of procuring money under the conditions about to develop, so I cashed three sterling

cheques for reasonable amounts, handing over *mille* notes, the absence of which I was bitterly to regret. I even paid for the ticket of one dear old lady whose name I do not know and whom I will never see again. I think we all lost our heads a little in that turmoil, but we were submitting to conditions of living which I should think unlikely ever to descend upon the world again. As day after day went by, people left off trying these schemes for departure, which seemed doomed always to failure. The crowds faded away, the expensive hotels began to clamour for their money, and slowly a dull morbid despair of ever extricating ourselves from the present situation began to affect us all day by day. Probably the greatest disappointment occurred not very long after the departure of the two coal ships. The private yacht belonging to the ex-Khedive was lying in port in the care of the agent, and it was suggested by a Colonel —, a retired officer of the British Army whose name I have forgotten, that we should approach the agent and see if it was possible to charter it. If we could not get as far as England we thought we might at least get to Gibraltar. Colonel —, the agent and I talked it over with Lord Furness, the moneyed man of the party, and we drew up a scheme in which it was arranged that we should ask a certain number of people who could afford a reasonable sum to find something toward the charter, and also a half-dozen of us agreed to revictual the boat for a fortnight or so, providing the cost and collecting what we could according to their means from the others. We began to look upon the matter as settled. Some of us, even including ourselves, had our luggage brought on board and began to think all our troubles were over. Then, at the last moment, came disappointment. The agent received a cable from his employer declining absolutely to charter the boat for the purpose we required it. There was no getting round it, the agent was adamant. Miserably we had to collect our belongings and send for conveyances again to get us back to the hotel. The

originators of the scheme with great enterprise succeeded in collecting for everyone who contributed the full amount of the expenses—a very sporting effort indeed.

Finally my wife and I talked it over one night and decided to go back to Roquefort. We knew we should have to face a very disagreeable situation but it seemed the only course left to us. Our money was fast disappearing, the ships that were to have come so soon and taken us away turned out to be phantoms, as the trains turned out to be ghost trains. We turned our backs on Cannes and those days of wild agitated bustle.

*Paradise regained*

WE left Cannes with very heavy hearts, but as we neared Rocquefort-les-Pins we felt our spirits grow lighter and lighter. It was a perfect summer evening, there was a gentle breeze all the way stealing down from the mountains and there was, after all, a great sense of relief in leaving the hysterical crowd behind us. My wife had one great happiness before her, and I think it almost atoned for our dreary home-coming. Elizabeth Russell, when she had left for America, had given us her favourite dog, Chunkie, and my wife had parted from him with extreme reluctance. Our return was in a way, for we are both dog lovers, marvellous. As we turned into the avenue we saw a depressed little white dog seated on one of the stone flags outside the house. We saw him prick up his ears at the sound of the car, we saw his head a little on one side, listening and sniffing ; a few seconds later he was tearing down towards us, mad with excitement. We stopped the car, and for a time Chunkie's joy at seeing us again made us forget our own heavy hearts. We had mad caresses from him and there seemed to be a queer sort of haunting pathos in his present wild state which told us what he had suffered. Then, too, Marc's broad smile was in itself a welcome, and the smile of the village *dame à tout faire*, whom he had engaged for us, made it all seem like a genuine home-coming. We walked round the grounds which we had left with little expectation of ever seeing again, even the pigeons came out and took a little notice of us, and a strange dog who had attached himself to the premises for some months came out to add

to the rejoicing. To me it was always astonishing to find that wealth of dust-sheets and newspapers and the hangings over my few but precious books disappear so quickly. Home was smiling at us even before I had opened up the wine cellar. Marc had provided ice, a cocktail basket was amongst our few travelling possessions, and very soon we sat out in the shadow of our cypresses, watched the butterflies, listened to the nightingale and sniffed once more the delightfully mingled perfumes of our mountain pines and the roses with which my wife's balcony was smothered. We neither of us felt like talking, but I ventured upon one little remark :

“ This is better than Cannes, after all.”

My wife, who is an indulgent critic of everyone we meet and every phase of life we have been called upon to encounter, shivered.

“ The hotel there—the people—they were awful,” she admitted.

“ And the noise,” I murmured.

Indeed, except for leaving behind the Furnesses, we began to feel that it was almost a home-coming. We ate our cold chicken and salad and drank our country wine at our table under the pine trees with complete content. The peace of it all was wonderful. It was not until radio time that we felt drawn back to earth again. Even that had its antidote. We moved back again into the gardens, struggling against a fresh wave of depression to find ourselves in a new scene of enchantment. Everywhere as far as we could see, over the flower gardens, down the olive groves, across the meadows and the flagged pavement on a corner of which our coffee was waiting, the world seemed to be given over to the reign of the fireflies. They darted here and there, tiny winged creatures who seemed to have caught up the lanterns of immortality. Even Marc, who was working late that night, paused at our table and waved his arm around.

“ They make a feast for your coming, Madame,” he

said to my wife. "Never before this season have I seen such numbers. They carry with them *la lanterne immortelle*; it is a good omen, their coming."

We are all of us more or less children at heart, I believe, and we were quite willing to believe it. We sat, as our old friend Pepys would have said, in a state of great content, until the darkness deepened and our visitors winged their mysterious way into their unseen homes. Chunkie lay at our feet, supremely happy; the stray dog lay a little further away, his eyes watching our every movement, timid but benign. The nightingales sang from the cypresses at the foot of the meadow to their friends on the outskirts of the wood. We sat there until the night breezes were stilled and no longer brought us down from the hillside the perfume of the ghostly white exotics, and the moon shone through the tops of the trees as we made our way reluctantly indoors. It was long before we forgot our simple home-coming.

Life next morning began to present its more prosaic aspect. Rationing had arrived during our absence, and the rationing was very severe indeed. We had no stores, and even with Marc's help—and Marc was the chosen friend of most of the farmers and shopkeepers within reach—we found living very difficult. The days of hardship had indeed commenced, but starvation was still far away, for our kitchen garden had been well looked after and had plenty to offer us. Still, life was difficult. There was a covey of young partridges on one of my own fields, a few rabbits, and at night some wild pigeons flew over at a great height but well within range. I set out to find Marc, who was working in the garden.

"Marc," I told him, "I cannot find one of my guns. Where have you kept them?"

He looked at me sorrowfully.

"But Monsieur," he confided, "your shot-guns, the small rifle, the twenty-bore of Madame's—they were all

claimed by the Maire. It was a law which all had to obey ; there is not a weapon left in the village."

I was staggered but not altogether despondent. I knew the Maire and I knew that he was a good fellow. I made my way to his house and took my place with the others who sought audience. I was granted the favour in a very few moments.

" Monsieur le Maire," I explained, after we had shaken hands, " at Notre Dame we commence to starve. In the home wood there are partridges, there are also rabbits. If they are left alone one must remember that there are also weasels and stoats. Will you permit me the use of one of my guns and a handful of my cartridges ? "

The Maire looked at me despondently.

" Monsieur," he replied, " it is utterly impossible. It is against the laws of the Commune."

" You can keep the rifle," I pointed out. " It is the rifle alone which would be of any service to your Home Guard here or your police. For the shot-guns, my cartridges carry only shot of the size of number six or seven. They would be useless as weapons. But a brace of partridges, Monsieur le Maire, consider ! The game laws cannot exist in these times."

I was met with not even a gentle refusal. The Maire, whose manners had always been exceptionally pleasant, assumed a severity of which I would never have believed him capable.

" What you ask is quite impossible, Monsieur Oppenheim," he said firmly. " No weapons of any sort will leave my possession until the law is changed. Furthermore, there is the affair of the *essence*. Your chauffeur has been round this morning with his card. I have sent him away."

" You mean to say that I am to have no petrol at all ? " I exclaimed.

" Not one drop," was the curt reply. " One would have thought that Marc would have explained this to

Monsieur. Besides, it is not now possible to grant Monsieur the permission to circulate. Neither your cars nor the petrol allowance would be of the slightest use."

" You do not wish us English to remain here, then—even the property owners ? " I asked.

Monsieur le Maire was indeed a changed spirit. I recognised no longer the genial friend and neighbour.

" It is not for me to say that, Monsieur," he replied. " You must do as you think well. But there is little food to eat, little wine to drink, and the servants of Monsieur, save those of his own nationality, are already fighting for *la patrie*. You will excuse."

He left me for a conference with the Maire of an adjoining Commune. I made my way back to Notre Dame. The idea of being shut up, even in paradise, without the means of egress, outside the reach of any of one's friends, medical help or service of any sort was staggering to say the least of it. I realised as we sat at luncheon, making a further inroad on the chicken of the night before, the real meaning of the silence by which we were surrounded. Save for an occasional lorry there were no cars upon the road. The idea of no petrol was almost as great a shock to my wife as to myself.

" No more bathing for you," she remarked sympathetically.

I nodded gloomily. During our stay in Cannes my morning swim had been the one pleasure left to me.

" I shall have to take up gardening in earnest," I said with a sigh, for I do not like gardening.

" And even if you can find a secretary," Elsie continued, " how are you going to get her here ? "

" There is a bus from Grasse," I said.

" It is generally an hour late. It is always overfull and if there are soldiers waiting they have the first use of it. Besides, what sort of a secretary would you get, I wonder, who would be willing to travel by bus in times like these ? "

" We shall starve," I warned her.

"Not until we've eaten several acres of vegetables," was the cheerful reply. "Besides, if you found a secretary what use would she be to you? You couldn't get your manuscripts sent away. You'd much better make up your mind to have a long rest. Dr. Bresse says that you need one."

"I hate resting," I replied peevishly.

"It would be very good for you. Besides, what is the use of worrying? If we are to live here without a car, well, it would be a nuisance, but where should we want to go to? Except for your bathing or scouring the place for food, I can't see that it would be much good to us."

I came to the conclusion that my wife was developing a vein of common sense in adversity which was a wholesome contrast to my own irritability. I said no more at the time, but a complete rest, I decided, was out of the question. That afternoon after tea (accompanied by a piece of bread with no butter) I wrote by hand the first half chapter of a new novel.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### *A Tragical Love Affair*

IT was only a few days after I had been assured that permission to circulate was now impossible to any civilian, that I watched with a start of surprise the progress of a saloon car which had turned in at our avenue and was making its way towards the front. My surprise was changed in a few minutes to delight. I threw down some impossible gardening implement I had been wielding and welcomed the visitor from the open courtyard in front of the house. It was one of our most charming friends, Winifred Fortescue. We exchanged the usual incoherent and breathless salutations, in which Elsie joined. We were both very fond of our visitor.

"Where have you been hiding yourselves?" she asked.

"The Carlton," I answered grimly. "We've been hanging on there hoping that one of these efforts to get away would be successful. Not a chance."

We found comfortable chairs under the trees and sat down to gossip. We both had friends in common, and the great interest in life just at that time was to discover who had succeeded in getting away and who was left.

"Fancy finding you really here," Lady Fortescue remarked, lighting a cigarette. "At least a dozen people have told me that you went off in one of those hulks. I couldn't believe it of you, Phillips. I know how you hate discomfort. But when I found out it was really true that Somerset Maugham had gone, I felt I would believe anything."

"All very well for Maugham," I pointed out, "but

he was alone. It was bound to be much worse for the women than for the men in any case."

"A voyage under those conditions," our visitor declared, "must have been a sort of hell. I'm very glad you had the good sense not to take Elsie."

"If they would only let us alone here," my wife sighed, "I should be perfectly content."

"They are not likely to do that," Lady Fortescue declared. "The whole place is full of rumours this morning."

"Don't tell us one of them," I begged. "We listen to the radio every day and we don't even compare notes about what we hear. For the rest of the time war doesn't exist. It's the only way to keep sane in solitude."

"You are very wise," our visitor declared.

"Tell me where you are," I enquired, "and how you got the petrol to come here?"

"I am still working at the canteen and still at my own little house. I have let it, but my tenant does not come in for another week or two. As for the petrol, I am working for the French, you see, so I have a small allowance. I've used a whole day's coming over to see if you people were here."

It was a wonderful Christian action, we told her. "You have a dozen or so charming people to talk to at your *foyer*. We haven't a soul here but the Maire, and just now we are not popular."

Lady Fortescue nodded wisely.

"Neither shall I be soon," she confided. "It's no use concealing the fact, we are not popular just now, and I really don't see why."

"No war," I begged.

"Not even between us?"

"Tell me how to find a secretary instead."

She took out a small piece of paper and scribbled a name and address.

"There you are," she said. "Her brother is a great

friend of mine, they live in Grasse ; the girl is disgracefully pretty, but I can't help that, and I believe she's engaged. Anyhow, she wants to come to you. I knew you'd be wanting somebody."

"But how is she going to get here ?" I asked. "Has she a car ?"

"No, but she's willing to take the bus. She really wants to earn some pocket-money, and although, of course, she is French, her mother is an Englishwoman and she speaks the language just as well as we do. She did some of my last book for me, and I can't remember that she made a single mistake."

"Sounds too good to be true," Elsie commented.

"You wait until you see her," our friend retaliated. "You'll thank heaven then that Phillips isn't particularly susceptible. At least," she added, with an ironic little gesture, "he's never seemed so with me."

"I've learnt," I told her, "to conceal my feelings. Your remark is a proof of my success."

"The battle of words now commences," she remarked. "I don't think we'll go at it seriously today, Phillips. I'm tired, talked to all those people at the canteen, and it's so peaceful here. My tongue doesn't feel in the least nimble and I don't think my brain is working. Can Dominie have a run now, please ?"

We went through our usual programme. I gathered Chunkie up, consoled him with a biscuit and the most comfortable easy-chair in my study. Afterwards I let Dominie out of the car and he tore round the place in a state of great excitement. It was an unfortunate fact that Chunkie was and always had been his mortal enemy, so after several efforts at a friendly meeting, involving a bitten thumb and a torn trouser leg, we had relinquished any attempts at peace-making and substituted separation, which was at any rate more satisfactory for me.

We all three, with Dominie in close attendance, started for a stroll around the flower gardens. Afterwards we

walked up to the woods and picked wild flowers, we sipped tea, and made a plan that Lady Fortescue should bring Mademoiselle Jacquelin up to the Domaine, and we also arranged that she, Lady Fortescue, should lunch with us each Sunday until she took her departure. Any other guests, it was clearly understood, would decide upon the size of the chickens we were able to procure.

The visit of a kindred spirit is always a pleasant thing. This one at any rate produced results, for a few days later I found myself dictating a vast accumulation of unwritten letters to a most stupefyingly beautiful young woman whose fingers were as nimble as her eyes were bright. We got through a portion of the letters with ridiculous speed, and I am not sure that we should not have finished the whole lot before closing time, but unfortunately towards the evening one of the officers of the Battery called to see me on a matter connected with the *foyer*. He was naturally introduced to my temporary secretary, and his collapse was immediate. In the course of a few words of conversation he learned that she lived at Grasse and he remembered that he had an important engagement there himself a little later on in the evening, and he hoped that he might have the honour of giving Mademoiselle a lift. The consequence was that Mademoiselle Jacquelin departed a little before the time arranged, but with half the letters which had been on my conscience so long neatly addressed, stamped and in her possession. I did not grudge her departure.

When it got to serious work, however, as I told Lady Fortescue a little later on, it got somewhat on my nerves to catch glimpses of loiterers in uniform round the distant corner from which the buses left and have one or two of the bolder ones turn up for a little quiet putting on my green or giving my wife advice about her flowers. I ventured upon a certain amount of mild remonstrance.

"You know, Mademoiselle," I expostulated mildly one evening, "I simply cannot afford to keep the whole mess of the Battery going in cocktails, nor can I give up

the last three-quarters of an hour of my work to yield to the manœuvres which seem to take place between your admirers as to who shall conduct you to the omnibus."

There was once more that irresistible little twinkle in her eyes. She took me by the arm and led me a little further up the hill to a secondary chalet we possessed which was completely out of sight.

"There," she said, "I'm just as interested in this work as you are, and I do not wish that you should be disturbed by all these stupid young men. We will continue our work here until ten minutes before the bus goes. After that I will leave and you shall amuse yourself by watching to see who catches the bus for me."

After that, of course, I could make no further complaints, and as a matter of fact the young lady's flirtations, which I believe were of the mildest kind, were just a source of amusement between us all. The time came, however, when a slightly disturbing element crept into the affair. I had noticed a somewhat *distract* air about my secretary during the whole of the day, and I was scarcely surprised when she insisted upon our taking the afternoon's work to one of the most retired corners of the wood.

"Dear master," she said—I don't know why but that was her favourite form of address—"I have a confession to make."

"Not a serious one, I hope."

"No, but it is annoying," she sighed, "and I feel a little conscience-stricken."

"Which one is it?" I asked.

"It is the one who brought a car here last night."

I nodded.

"Well?"

"I am worried," she went on. "I always thought he seemed to be the least in earnest of any of them, so perhaps I did let him chaff a little more. Today I am very unhappy. Quite unexpectedly, he proposed marriage to me."

"They will do that, you know, in time," I reminded her. "Peggy Fortescue, on my advice, has told everyone in the neighbourhood that you are to be married, but it doesn't seem to have made any difference."

"It hasn't," she answered gloomily. "They seem to think that a poor girl who is separated from her fiancé is free to flirt just as much as she likes, and so they behave, if anything, almost worse—that is to say, they continue to say stupid things and are difficult to keep in their place."

"Well, and what is the immediate trouble?" I asked—perhaps a little bluntly.

"Mine is a serious engagement," she confided. "I am very fond of the man whom I shall some day marry."

"Quite all right," I observed. "Why not tell the interloper and have done with it? That, after all, would be the kindest way out of it."

She made a little gesture in which there was a dash of embarrassment and not a little self-shame.

"I ought to have told him at once," she sighed. "The man whom I am engaged to marry is on the staff of General Krunster."

"A German!" I exclaimed.

"A German," she assented.

I was staggered for a moment or two.

"How did that come about?" I asked.

"Ski-ing," she answered sadly. "We had met before in England, then we met again at St. Moritz. He was with the same ski-ing party."

"Tell him the truth, quick," I advised. "I shouldn't hesitate for a moment. The French are crazy about family connections and he would realise at once that the whole thing was impossible. It would cure him in half an hour."

"But I don't know that I want him to be cured in half an hour," she reflected moodily.

"Then you are an abominable little flirt, and I won't

listen to any more of your confessions. To work at once, if you please, Mademoiselle."

She looked very sorry for herself for a minute or two, but I was not feeling particularly yielding. I worked until she very nearly missed her bus, and she tore away with the briefest of farewells. The actual ending of her romance I never knew, but whereas she turned up on the following day for work, quite punctually, her local admirer went away for leave at the end of the week, and when he failed to return the Commandant told me that he had made an exchange. Mademoiselle Jacquelin remained with me until the fact that I was unable to send for her and the Grasse bus was taken off terminated our connection automatically. She was a very good worker and we parted with mutual regret. I hope that she is now married to the man of her choice.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### *Orders to quit*

THE summer drew on apace, and with it our restlessness. The food question became so difficult that in order to give Elsie a rest from the inconvenience of it all we moved down to the Montfleuri Hotel for a time, where we were really very comfortable, and our friend, Monsieur Tamme, looked after us exceedingly well. The indoor life was a little trying, but the sea-bathing was once more possible, and that I enjoyed either at Garoupe or at Cannes itself every day. It was a costly procedure, however, at Garoupe, for I was still without any petrol and my weekly visits home cost me a great deal more than I could afford.

Here we lived the quietest of lives. Neither my wife nor I ever cared for the films, the Country Club for golf was closed and the Nice Club, where we went perhaps once a week, combining it sometimes with a visit home, was too far away for any regular attendance. A few of our old friends were still to be found. Christopher Furness, alas, had paid the penalty for one of those desperate efforts to get home, and was brought back to the villa his wife had recently purchased at Cap Ferrat to die of pneumonia. It was a very sad ending, and we all missed him very much indeed. It was about this time, talking over the circumstances of Furness' unfortunate journey, that I made up my mind that nothing would ever induce me to take one of those trains to Lisbon without a courier or any definite directions or guidance. So many amongst my friends had returned, having spent their money, suffered infinite discomfort, and nothing to show for it.

Food was getting scarce these days, not only food but every article of clothing from silk stockings to woollen vests. All these things were almost unprocurable, cigarettes too—especially the Wills brands—practically disappeared for two months and nothing but Turkish or Syrian tobacco was obtainable anywhere. I found a daily secretary who came to me regularly at the hotel about this time, who helped me to do a little work and kept my correspondence in order. If it had not been for that little effort the deadly monotony of the days would, I think, have made life almost intolerable.

By degrees one or two old friends made their reappearance. I met Mrs. Stuart-Wortley, better known to fame as Edvina, one morning coming out of her hairdresser's and complimented her on her appearance. She pointed back to the famous beauty-shop.

"Driven to it nowadays," she observed. "Anyhow, I'm perfectly miserable."

"What do you want more than anything else in the world to make you happy?" I asked her.

"Money and potatoes," she replied.

"Money has become nothing but a joke," I told her, "but are you serious about the potatoes?"

"My dear Mr. Opp," she said, "I haven't tasted potatoes for months, and I used to live on them."

"Well, we will see," I ventured.

That was the blessed day—which is why I remember it so well—that Alfred McIntyre, my dear friend in Boston, who had been trying for so long to send me money, suddenly found the right method, and the next morning I had a cabled draft for several hundred dollars by my bedside. We spent five hundred francs on a taxicab for the day, drove up to Notre Dame, having previously telephoned Marc, had a few happy hours there and returned to the hotel with two sacks of potatoes. One I sent at once to Edvina. The other I was hesitating about when my wife met a very agreeable acquaintance whom we had known

slightly for some years and who had just strolled up to the hotel for an apéritif. We found that his plight as regards potatoes was worse than Edvina's, as he had had none at all since the shortness commenced, so we deposited the remaining sack in the hall of the hotel and told him that before the evening we would see to it that he had potatoes enough to last him for some little time. We did not deliver them ourselves because we had a call to make, but when we returned to the hotel the potatoes were gone, and some mutual friends of ours who were telling the story in the hotel to a very amused crowd informed us that they had just seen the Prince Gennaro de Bourbon wheeling into his garage, in the gardener's barrow, a sack of potatoes. That night we all met for a cocktail, and someone, talking over the hard times we were going through, suggested that if ever I thought of writing my memoirs I could tell the story of how in Cannes, once the most fashionable resort of all France, a prince of one of the most famous families in Europe had wheeled a small sack of potatoes to the garage which was temporarily his abode, and how Edvina, to whom years ago the mankind of the world were offering on their bended knees all the gifts she could name, received from a struggling author and his wife, with joy and happiness, a similar gift—of potatoes.

We spent the following week-end at Lady Furness' new home, a very beautiful villa at Cap Ferrat, which she was busily transforming with her usual magical touch into a palace. Phyllis Satterthwaite was a fellow guest, playing tennis every morning, unchanged, as agile and swift in her movements as ever. And another interesting person there was Lady Furness' son by a former marriage, young Campbell, who has already made a very successful essay in fiction and is now engaged upon a novel.

I have omitted to mention that some short time before this the interests of the remaining Britishers upon the Riviera had been taken over by the American Consulate.

English people with any means at all or with friends in England able to guarantee their financial position, were able to obtain a small advance for themselves, their servants and children. It was a great relief to us all, and as up till September and October 1940 living was cheaper in France than in England, those of us who were blessed with a kitchen garden and live produce of any sort, or who had not quite reached the end of their savings, were able to struggle along with a moderate amount of comfort. Our sterling accounts were still completely blocked but our franc accounts, after many false alarms, were usually available if there was anything left in them. There were very few of us, however, who had anything at all to spend on luxuries, but somehow or other the fact that we were all in the same boat seemed to do away to a great extent with the irksomeness of the situation. So we plodded on, hoping every day for some great news and poring over any English or American journal we were able to obtain.

Then came an unforgettable morning. We were spending a few days up at Notre Dame, where I personally was always much happier than down in Cannes, and I was having my coffee out on the flagged terrace when the *facteur* came up the avenue with the letters. The first one which he put into my hands was startling. Printed in black letters, in familiar fashion, I read "On His Majesty's Service"—but the postmark itself was Nice. I handed over my usual *pourboire* for a registered letter and ignored that little pilgrimage which the *facteur* usually made, round to the servants' quarters. I tore open the letter. Nothing could have been simpler or more straightforward than its contents. All British citizens were ordered by the Foreign Office to return to their own country without delay. Such facilities as were possible to aid in their doing so would be afforded by the British American Consulate in Nice. I clutched the letter in my hand and called up the stone steps for Elsie. I forgot the

caress of that pine-scented breeze, the perfume of those clinging clusters of late roses, the glory of the bougainvillea, all the joyous early-morning tranquillity of my French Domaine,—I forgot all these things. I instead thought of London, I fancied I heard English voices in my ears, I forgot all the dire news we had been listening to on the radio day by day, I forgot all those stories of ruined buildings and memorials we shall never see again. London—many a time in despondency I had thought that I should never tread its pavements again. It was incredible.

I had no words when Elsie arrived. I pushed the notice into her hands. She shook her head.

“Read it to me,” she begged.

I obeyed. She listened, looking a little puzzled all the time but without any particular emotion.

“We are to go back to England, Elsie,” I said. “Do you understand?”

“How?” she asked, in a most practical fashion.

“Train, I suppose,” I told her. “Train to Lisbon, plane afterwards. I don’t know. The Government are to help.”

She handed me back the notice and I saw her eyes wandering round the place. She stooped and picked up Chunkie, reprimanded him for some slight misdemeanour, set him down again on his four legs and turned to give an order to the cuisinière.

“You will see Geraldine, and John,” I reminded her.

Then the light broke across her face and I understood. England, after all, could never mean quite the same to her as to me. Not even the thought of seeing again her daughter and grandson were entire compensation for what we were leaving. I cunningly struck another note.

“The Government would not have ordered us home without a reason,” I said gravely.

She was more resigned after a moment's further reflection.

"When do we start?" she asked.

"For England, I don't know. For Nice, in half an hour. I'm going to telephone now. If that fellow up at Bar-le-Duc can take us."

"I'll go and get a dress on."

To my surprise the Consulate at Nice was not over-crowded and we were ushered almost at once into the presence of the very charming American gentleman who had been directing our destinies for some few months.

"Got your notice, I see," he remarked.

"This morning," I replied. "What do you think about it?"

"You must go," was the firm reply. "My instructions are to clear out every Britisher I get near. Honestly, Mr. Oppenheim, my advice to you is to get your papers out, buy your tickets and prepare to start off at once."

"I can't close up the house in ten minutes," Elsie remarked a little dubiously.

"My dear lady," the Consul said, "you won't be called upon for anything quite so extreme as that. You couldn't leave for a fortnight, however hard you tried. We have to get your exit permits—and let me tell you, those exit permits are giving me a little trouble just now. Then you'll have to collect a certain amount of money for the voyage, book your passages on the 'plane, and if you have any friends with influence in London, cable over to them to try and get you priority. The Ministry of Information or the Foreign Office might manage it for you. Then you must have the money sent to the agents in Bristol for your passages on the 'plane, and you must bring in your passports and hand them over, and your *cartes d'identité*."

"We brought the passports and the *cartes d'identité*," I told him.

He drew a sheet of paper towards him.

"How many?" he asked.

"Myself and wife, here, her maid——"

"What nationality?" he asked quickly.

"British," I assured him.

"Good. Who else?"

This is where I scented trouble. I knew very well what was to come.

"Chauffeur," I answered.

"Nationality?"

"British."

"Age?"

"About twenty-eight."

"My dear Mr. Oppenheim," the Consul said, laying down his pen for a minute, "I could no more get an exit permit for your chauffeur than I could get you a first, single, for Heaven. You must know that yourself."

"Yes, I'm afraid I know it," I admitted, "but there's just one thing—being born in Guernsey, he doesn't come under the English conscription laws. They have a militia of their own."

"Had, you mean," the Consul corrected me with a somewhat irritated smile. "We won't waste time talking about your chauffeur, Mr. Oppenheim. If he looks over the fence into an occupied department in France he will be interned or made a prisoner of war. Hard luck, of course, but it can't be helped. You'd better let my secretary talk to you now about finance, luggage and passports."

"Why are there so few people about?" my wife asked.

"I don't think there are so many Britishers here as people imagine," the Consul replied, "and a good many of those that are still here have permanent homes or occupations or are past the age which makes a return necessary. You and your husband are not compelled to go," he added. "But that does not prevent my very

strongly advising you to leave just as soon as I can send you.

" And when do you think that will be ? "

" Oh, a fortnight or three weeks," was the casual answer. " We'll make it as early as we can."

It was two months before we got away.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### *A Toast with Prince Andrew of Greece*

WE left the American Consulate firmly convinced that this time at any rate our departure from France was imminent. We called at the American Express Company, and though we found it by no means an easy matter we contrived to secure a certain amount of dollar currency to help us on the journey across Spain. Afterwards we lunched with Woolrych, my Nice lawyer, and lunched exceedingly well. Eating and drinking had by this time attained almost a new significance, and a restaurant meal at the Ruhl Grill Room with practically no restrictions awakened all our latent instincts of greed. In the afternoon I gave my last instructions to my friend Woolrych in his private office, handed over to him the money to carry them out, gave him further instructions as to how to act in case of crisis and supplied him with the necessary means for looking after the Domaine during my absence. In the evening we returned to Notre Dame, paid over our five hundred francs for the hire of the taxi and settled ourselves down to another melancholy period of waiting. We were only allowed to take on the journey exactly what we could carry ourselves, and as the whole collection included such oddments as my despatch-box, which was pretty heavy, my wife's dressing-case, which shared the same fault, with all the rugs, and small luncheon basket, we had little enough space for the bare necessities of the voyage. We looked out the articles themselves, but, fortunately, delayed packing them for the moment. Then we went through the rooms and selected a few treasures, added a few clothes, a few books, my Chinese Buddha,

which I was obliged to leave behind after all, and many trifles which we hated to part with, packed two reasonable-sized trunks and addressed them fully to ourselves at Lisbon. We got in touch with the forwarding agents recommended by the Consulate, and despatched the trunks a few days before the fortnight was up. It was very cold out at Notre Dame and we had no fuel left except timber, which we had to use even for the central heating. We waited for nearly three weeks, and on the very day we had made up our minds to ring up the Consulate, Mr. McGowan, the American Consul, rang us up himself.

"You and your wife are all fixed for starting, I suppose," he began—and it seemed to me from the first that there was something sinister in his tone.

"All packed, all ready, only waiting for your word," I replied.

"Well, I am afraid I have some bad news for you," he confided. "I cannot any longer get your passports visa-ed by the Prefect here. I got them back this morning. They have to be sent to Vichy."

The news almost took my breath away. For obvious reasons I was not at all anxious that our passports should go to Vichy for inspection.

"Is there anything personal about this?" I asked MacGowan.

"So far as I can gather, no," he assured me. "I have sent round purposely to make sure, but I am told that the same ruling applies to everyone. In future no one is to leave this district until their passports have been sent to Vichy and examined there."

"Is that likely to lead to much delay?" I enquired.

"I hope not," the Consul replied. "Your passports are all in order and I have already sent them on. You ought to get them back in, say, a week. I have written specially to the authorities, and we shall do everything we can to hurry the matter through."

"This means we shall not be able to go on the train with the rest of the people?" I asked him.

"Well, there were only a few of them left," he told me. "I am afraid they must go off tomorrow, and very glad I shall be to get rid of them. You see, Mr. Oppenheim, there is no doubt that you were unfortunate. You are the first ones to be delayed by the new regulations."

Well, that was the news I had to go and tell my wife. To make things worse, it was not easy to get the heating of the house running properly with wood alone, and not an ounce of coke or coal were we able to get. Outside the weather was bitter, and the tops of even the nearest of the mountains were enveloped in a driving storm of snow. The postman arrived, blue with cold, and with the ominous news that the road to Grasse was very difficult and would probably be blocked in an hour's time. I gave him a glass of red wine and sent him into the kitchen to have it warmed. Then I rang up my friend who had the five-hundred-franc taxicab at Bar-le-Duc, engaged in a long and fierce argument with him, and having at last arrived at a compromise, mounted the stairs to Elsie's sitting-room. I told her the bad news, but I gave her no time to indulge in more than one expression of dismay.

"The taxicab will be here in half an hour," I told her. "We are going into the Montfleuri Hotel. We shall be nearer the train when our time comes, we shall be warm, and you won't have to think about meals again until we get to England. I have plenty of francs left, so you need not look upon this visit, at any rate, as an extravagance."

My wife is not a demonstrative person, but I think she came very near to embracing me.

Monsieur Tamme, proprietor of the Montfleuri Hotel, amongst many other excellent qualities is a born hôtelier. He is not the sort of man to be caught napping. He had plenty of coke for his furnaces and coal for his salons. He

had also considerable stores of everything that was necessary for the delectation of his guests. Without any temptation to over-eat or over-drink, we still were able to enjoy meals of excellent quality and sufficient quantity, with the supreme advantage, from a woman's point of view—as an American lady at the next table remarked—of “not having to cadge round for the stuff.” He had an excellent stock of wine and he had possessed experience enough to enable him to buy only the best vintages. He willingly consented to take care of our trunks full of oddments until the happy time might come when we should meet again, and he also made a kindly offer about his hotel bill, which I am thankful to say I was not obliged to accept. We stayed with him for six weeks, waiting for that telephone call. We had an instrument in our salon, but I became so weary of answering it, hoping to hear the Consul's suave voice and suffering disappointment, that I finally gave over its sole use to the temporary secretary Monsieur Tamme had provided for me.

We spent a very quiet Christmas Day, luching alone, but receiving several welcome calls in the afternoon from various friends, and owing to the pleasant Continental custom of sending flowers, our little salon was like a conservatory before the day was over. A friend of mine who had been given a tin of petrol and a box of cigarettes for his Christmas presents drove me round to two or three cafés during the afternoon, but there were very few cheerful faces to be seen. I had the happiness, however, of wishing a Happy Christmas and drinking a toast to his country with an old acquaintance, Prince Andrew of Greece, in the Café de Paris. Our neighbours from Mougins, Colonel Buzzard and his wife, with their two delightful daughters, Elizabeth and Katerina, struggled down on various forms of bicycles from the hills with news of the Domaine, where wolves had been seen, and gifts which, owing to my wife's foresight, we were able to reciprocate. Two very pleasant

young Scotch ladies, of whom we always saw a good deal when we were in Cannes, rejoicing in the somewhat unusual name of D'Oudi, wandered in about cocktail time, but I think the pleasantest moment of the day was when we raised our glasses and drank our little toast to one another at dinner-time, to the day which we knew could not now be far distant.

During the first week of January the great news arrived. Our visas had been granted. There were still a few formalities to be gone through, but we were instructed to leave by the eight o'clock train from Cannes station on January the 14th. These formalities Monsieur Tamme himself kindly took in hand for me, accompanied by my wife where one of the family was necessary. On the 13th, the day before our departure, Enid Furness gave us a small farewell luncheon at the Ruhl Grill. Lady Hadfield was there, from whom I accepted various commissions which I duly attended to in London. Lady Hadfield and her husband, during his lifetime, had been generous benefactors to the various war charities in both England and France. She was very popular in Cap Ferrat, where her villa is situated, and she told me that she had decided to take all risks and stay where she was. I believe really that Enid Furness had very much the same idea, to judge by her plans for the extension and improvement of her already beautiful estate. Young Campbell was also of the party, also Phyllis Satterthwaite and, I believe, Colonel Carelton, the secretary of the Cannes Country Club, who since the closing of the golf had devoted his time to philanthropic and charitable works of every description in the neighbourhood. And "Billy" Wessel, full of good-humour and spirits as usual. We drank one another's healths, but, as usual in these days, conversation was a little limited and restrained. I was given many messages to deliver in England, most of which I have successfully accomplished.

It was a very pleasant little festival, that luncheon, and

a delightful memory to us both. I think, however, when the time came for us to make our final adieux, that neither my wife nor I realised how long it would be before we should see again so many smiling faces clustered around, hear so many cheerful words, or how little chance we stood of being welcomed back home at our journey's end in the same light-hearted manner.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### *We start on the Journey Home*

STRICTLY according to plan, at a few minutes before eight on the following day we stood on the platform of Cannes railway station in the grim light of a grey morning, bidding farewell to a few English friends who had come to see us off on our long-projected journey. The wonderful moment had arrived at last. I think that one or two of our friends looked upon us rather in the light of deserters. We ourselves had no feeling of the sort. We were obeying the orders received from the British Foreign Office to return to our own country.

Our leave-taking itself was by no means a happy one. We realised to the full, as did our friends, the difficulties ahead of us. Hundreds had started on this same expedition and, before their journey was half-way accomplished, had found the doors of their carriages thrown open and the uniformed attendant shouting out his unwelcome message : "*Messieurs, Mesdames, would be pleased to descend and bring with them all their baggage. The frontiers are closed. It is by order of the Spanish authorities.*"

All very simple and very disgusting. We had heard it described so often before. The descent on to a sloppy platform, a vain quest for rooms in the one hotel in the district, misery and discomfort for many hours, in the end an ignominious return to Nice or Cannes. For this was one of those journeys from which, unless you are particularly careful, if you take one step too far there can be no return. If you outstay the time marked upon your passport or cross the frontier at certain places, you are in occupied territory and nothing can get you back again.

This was the ugly possibility which confronted us during the whole of the earlier part of our journey, which I may say was undertaken under the most uncomfortable conditions possible. Six of us were crowded into a compartment intended for four, and not one of our fellow passengers would consent to a window being even a few inches open. We ate our picnic luncheon by snatches and without appetite, and for a little air we had to stumble and push our way out on to the corridor. We reached Narbonne at last in the twilight, the rain coming down hopelessly, no lights upon the platform and a crowd which seemed immovable. It took us an hour before I could bribe a man to fetch us a vehicle, a victoria which had lost its hood and was protected only by a soaking horse-cloth. However, we reached in the end what I believe is the only hotel in the place, the Grand, found rooms, and by dint of more bribing got a fire lit with sticks little larger than matches in one of the bedrooms. We dried ourselves as well as we could, afterwards we drank half a bottle of Dubonnet and descended to the *salle à manger*, where we were served with quite a good dinner, drank a bottle of excellent country wine and felt the chill slowly passing from our limbs. I had a few moments afterwards with the very pleasant and civil manager, who gave me some useful information about the journey and warned me particularly against disclosing my stock of francs in the Customs the next day. Eventually I sent fifteen *mille* back to my lawyer in Nice by registered post.

At eight o'clock the next morning, in the same vehicle, we were driven to the station and joined in what seemed to be a football scrum to get anywhere near the platform. Inch by inch we fought our way towards the waiting train, literally dragging our luggage after us, until a junior official of some sort saw what I was clutching between the fingers of one hand, relieved my wife of her dressing-case and the maid of my bag, and flung us into a carriage the door of which he unlocked with one hand while he

endeavoured to keep the people out with his other arm. It was a ten-franc *pourboire* well expended, for we got corner seats and were able to pull down the window for a few minutes before starting. There were eleven of us in the *voiture* as the train groaned its way out of the station, and the corridors outside were filled with a seething crowd.

At twelve o'clock we arrived at Cerbère, the frontier town. Here I was fortunate enough to secure a porter, who carried our belongings into a huge barn, dignified by the name of restaurant. Luncheon was prepared at one long table, and an American Express man took us temporarily in charge, found us places and himself helped to serve a lunch of which I will make no mention. After the repast we stood by our bags for an hour, waiting for the Customs officers to stroll in from their obviously more sumptuous meal. I have had my luggage examined at most of the *douanes* in Europe at some period in my life, but I have never known such a foul and rigorous examination. My wife and the maid, barely enclosed by dilapidated screens, had practically the whole of their clothing removed. I myself was left with nothing on but my socks and shirt, my money was pounced upon, some of my most harmless toilet articles confiscated, after which I was ordered to dress hurriedly and come to the inspector. With all my care I seemed to have offended in some way against the regulations ; a little crowd of people took part in the argument about me in a stuffy office, and it appeared from what I could gather and the unexpected arrival of two gendarmes that my next resting-place was to be the local prison. In the end, however, the uproar was quelled by the ringing of a bell from the station platform. In less than half a minute the whole meeting was broken up, and I left the American Express man still in fierce confabulation with the inspector, the latter of whom had completely changed his attitude. I was surrounded by a very small but friendly crowd of four ; each explained to me in his

own fashion that I had broken the laws of the country by travelling with ivory-backed hairbrushes, by having in my possession a letter addressed to the British Ambassador at Madrid and by having two *mille* more than I was entitled to. I apologised for all my misdeeds. Everyone was becoming remarkably amiable ; there was a whispered conference ; one of the uniformed men came to me and drew me a little on one side.

“ Monsieur must pay a fine,” he announced.

There was another confabulation. Then the amount was broken to me. I looked at my friend, the American Express man, who was standing in the corner temporarily exhausted. He nodded his advice and I paid a fine of five hundred francs. I was then assisted into my coat and waistcoat, which I had carried from behind the screen, my friend from the American Express brought my luggage, everyone lit cigarettes, we were all smiles and bows, and then I was escorted on to the platform and wedged into a place next to my wife in a compartment which already held the moderate number of eight people.

“ Where to now ? ” I asked the American Express man.

He grinned.

“ Port Bou,” he announced. “ Not much of an examination there.”

So it was all over at last. The ugly possibility which had confronted us during the whole of the earlier part of our journey had now faded away. We were more fortunate than some of our predecessors. We were crossing the frontier. We were once more free people. I resorted with enthusiasm to my almost empty flask. Madame indulged in a little similar but more moderate refreshment, and we talked together once more of the world we had left behind us.

Much of it seemed like an ugly dream. We talked of the hotels, the Carlton, mistress of the Croisette, the Montfleuri which we had just quitted, both—the former especi-

ally—with their strange, weary company of guests, in many cases the ghosts of charming people worn out with the anxieties of an unnatural life. They had all acquired during the last few months the same harassed look, they were short of money or they feared the enemy, and they spent their days listening feverishly to the radio. Cannes was like a city of the dead, no man or woman smiled, light conversation seemed to have become a crime, the Casino was closed, dancing was forbidden, music was listened to in cold apathy.

Then there was Monte Carlo—what a travesty of the past ! It is true that the ball still runs its course round the roulette wheel and sinks with that same fatalistic click into its appointed destination. It is true that eager eyes still follow it, but these eyes have lost the gleam of hope. The light-hearted joy of gambling has disappeared, and in some strange manner the people themselves seem to have changed. They are the phantoms of the perished world to whom sport has become a dreary toil.

Sometimes one starts to recognise a familiar face, an English friend, perhaps, of whom one has lost sight. Always the same dreary little burst of conversation ! The anxious question of finance, the problem of returning home—some well-known person has tried and failed, someone else has disappeared. Perhaps a word or two as to the rates at the hotel, the food shortage, the foreign appropriation of butter. Then a farewell nod, a drifting apart, the end.

Our conversation harked back, as I fear it will do for many a day, to our own little pleasant Domaine which we had learned to call “home.” In reply to my somewhat too sentimental vapourings my wife spoke words of common sense.

“ To continue living there under present conditions,” she pointed out, “ was impossible. We could get no meat, the enemy had even been down to the harbour-master, obtained a list of the fishermen and secured all their daily

catch. All the fruit, all the butter, all the cheese was in their hands ; the ordinary purchaser had no chance. We could never have kept house for another two months."

In short, we talked ourselves into a state of resignation. It had been absolutely necessary for us to come away, and we had made at any rate a successful start.

We arrived at Barcelona late in the evening, to find ourselves the victims of a somewhat unfortunate mistake on the part of the Consulate. The hotel on their list, and at which they had engaged rooms for us, was the Bristol, but its recommendation was ridiculous. We arrived there in a storm of rain to find that there was no hall porter, only one dimly-lit lamp in the entrance hall from behind which a young lady blinked at us in vacant surprise. She understood no French, and we utterly failed to make her understand that we had come there to stay. We dragged our bags into the hall, and presently, after ringing every bell we could find, a very polite person arrived, who also stared at us in great surprise. My first question, as to whether this was an hotel or a mad-house, left him entirely unconcerned. He smiled at us blandly, and motioning to our bags waved his hand towards the door, apparently suggesting that we should get out and take them with us. We went round the place begging of everyone we saw as to whether they spoke a word of French. There was absolutely no result. The hotel advertised itself as the Bristol clearly enough, but even when I climbed to the first floor to try and find someone whom I could make understand, I came across only one giggling and exceedingly saucy-looking chambermaid who had beautiful teeth, marvellous dark hair and a sense of humour which I seemed to have tapped but which she seemed unable to control. Not a single comprehensible word could I get from her. I left at last and descended once more to the hall, where everyone was waiting for me. I shook my head sadly. The manager, who was standing in the background with

his hands behind his back, cheered up at my return and once more waved his hand towards the waiting *voiture*. There was nothing else to be done. We called for the *cocher* and returned our belongings. By some means or other we contrived to make him understand that the hotel was not suitable and that he was to find us another. He began to count them off on his fingers. There was nothing familiar in anything he said until he came to the Ritz. I stopped him at once.

"Ritz," I said firmly.

He cracked his whip and off we went. From behind the curtains the manager and the girl watched the departure of the lunatics, as I believe they really thought us. We drove along a handsome street, marvelling at the traffic, admiring the lights but getting colder and wetter every moment. At last, with a flourish, we arrived at our destination.

"They'll never let us in," my wife sighed.

"If we once cross that threshold," I answered, "they'll find it hard work to get us out." So in we sallied, and this time the driver was beginning to enter into the spirit of the thing. He carried my dressing-bag, a porter hurried out for the rest of our things, and I walked boldly to the reception desk.

"Two single communicating rooms with bath," I ordered in my best French. "And a room for the maid. We are very tired and very wet."

"The rooms are ordered?" the clerk asked doubtfully.

"Certainly," I replied. "Ordered from the Consulate at Nice. Please have us shown up at once. We have had a disagreeable journey and are very uncomfortable."

The young man bowed, touched a bell, escorted us to the lift, and the thing was done. I had no thought of asking the price of the rooms, notwithstanding the reduced state of my pocket-book. They were more than comfortable, they were luxurious. I signed our

names to the tablets the man offered me, pointed to the electric stove which he turned on in all the rooms at once, and was very careful not to forget to tip the porter who entered directly afterwards with the bags. The clerk withdrew with a bow. We were installed.

Hot baths and clean linen were wonderful restoratives. We handed Anna over to the care of a waiter who understood a little mixed French and English, discovered for ourselves a delightful little bar lounge where the bartender prepared for us two Dry Martinis as though he had been used to making them all his life. My wife and I exchanged smiles.

"Feeling better?" I asked.

"Perfectly marvellous," she answered. "Fancy getting rooms like that. The place seems crowded too. I honestly think, Phillips—"

"Well?"

"I should like another cocktail."

The bar-tender hurried forward to take the order. A moment or two later a very spick-and-span-looking *maître d'hôtel* with a huge menu in his hand presented himself.

"Monsieur would like to order his dinner?" he asked in very pleasant French.

"There is only one thing I should like better," I answered, glancing at the menu, "and that is that you order it for us. We neither of us speak or understand a word of Spanish. Keep to the French cuisine as far as you can and serve us with a light but wholesome dinner, with a chicken for *pièce de résistance*, in a quarter of an hour."

He drew himself up and bowed.

"And for wine, Monsieur?"

"That also I leave to you. Something not too heavy. I do not even know whether there is such a thing as Spanish champagne; if there is, we will try it but it must not be too sweet."

The man bowed once more.

"*C'est entendu, Monsieur,*" he announced.

"A table in a corner," I added. "We are travellers."

"As Monsieur desires."

Another bow and the man took his leave. Our second cocktail arrived. Our eyes met as we raised our glasses.

"Almost worth it," my wife sighed comfortably.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### *The Shadow over Spain*

WE slept late on the following morning, but as everything is late in Spain it did not seem to matter. We drove to Cooks and made every possible effort to obtain "sleepers" for the night train to Madrid. It was quite impossible, as everyone had told us it would be. We took instead ordinary first-class tickets but were unable to reserve places. Afterwards we changed five *mille* into pesetas, losing some fifty per cent upon the deal. English money was treated only with derision; the best offer I could get for a five-pound note was well under a sovereign. Later we drove round the city and harbour, both of which were exceedingly interesting, but I was astonished to see how little had been done to repair the disastrous effects of the last bombardment. We returned to the Ritz for lunch, having failed to make ourselves understood at a very handsome café which offered, we had been told, the best food in Spain. Our lunch at the Ritz, however, with its preliminary visit to the bar, was very pleasant. Afterwards there was only one thing of which either of us was capable, namely, sleep. My own eyes were hot and tired and my legs weary, and even my back was aching with the continual efforts of the last few days. We retired to our rooms and slept until seven o'clock.

An hour or so later we made our way to the station. The train, we were told, was an hour late; we were not allowed upon the platform, and we sat in a wretched barn of a waiting-room where the draughts were icy and the odours atrocious. The only compensation was that I sat upon our luggage, close to the door, and made friends

with a humorous little slip of an official who spoke French. Nothing that I could offer in the way of a *pourboire* would induce him to let us slip through on to the platform, but he did promise that we should be first through the doors when the train arrived and that he would bring our luggage himself. He kept his word to the best of his ability, pushing ruthlessly away everyone who joined in the rush when the bell of the train was heard, and we succeeded in reaching a compartment where we appropriated rather more than our share of the racks for our own things and my wife and I secured two corner seats.

Of that journey I have nothing to say except that it was as near Hell as anything I have ever imagined. We spent twelve hours in a mingled atmosphere of garlic, foul tobacco and worse. The distinction between classes, we were told, when I ventured upon a protest to the man who came in to examine our tickets, existed no longer in Spain, especially for "evacuees," amongst whom he clearly classed us. There was no sleep nor any rest ; a brandy flask kept us on the edge of living, and we tumbled out on to the platform at Madrid some twelve hours later a miserable trio of exhausted human beings. The fresh air and a little watery sunshine, followed by three cups of what was called "bean coffee," served with dry rusks, revived us a little. We found a porter to carry our luggage and we staggered to a *voiture*. I handed to the driver the card of the manager of the Ritz with the name of the hotel he had recommended. I forget the name of the hotel, but it was a little way outside the city ; it was approached by a high flight of steps, it stood in the midst of a beautiful garden and it had every appearance of luxury and comfort. Nevertheless from the first I had apprehensions, and directly I arrived at the desk I found them justified. A very courteous young man received me, glanced at the card and indulged in a gesture of deprecation.

"Mr. Oppenheim," he said, "we received also a telephone message from our friend here. We are desolated,

but we are over-booked to the extent of one hundred people ; we have let the billiard-room to a party of Americans, the whole of the Winter Garden has been taken over by a branch of our flying corps, every bath-room and servant's room in the place has been let, besides which our usual accommodation is besieged. Look at our book-stall and you will see what we think of you ; all your translated works are there. We should be proud to do anything we could for you, but there is nothing. I grieve also to disappoint my friend of the Ritz. I shall write him to explain. I myself am sleeping in a gardener's hut."

The young man spoke English perfectly ; he was only too obviously sincere. The man who refused to remove our bags from the *voiture* knew what he was doing. I turned sorrowfully away. He followed me to the door.

" Is there any place you could recommend ? " I asked.

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book and scribbled down three names. He initialled the paper before he handed it to me.

" I will tell you the truth, Mr. Oppenheim," he said. " I cannot imagine a single place in Madrid where you will obtain a lodging. Where all these people have come from who have flooded our city I do not know, but they are here from all corners of the world. Many of them are just like you—*en voyage* for Lisbon—but they occupy the rooms just the same."

We drove back into the heart of the city in our melancholy little *voiture*. One by one we visited the three hotels the names of which appeared on that slip of paper. At one, two porters barred the way and I was not allowed to enter the door. At the other two we received curt and absolutely final dismissal before we could show our young friend's initial upon the slip of paper. Our driver, who seemed to have resigned himself to a dull but probably profitable morning, was seated upon the box of his vehicle smoking a long cigarette composed of roughly rolled black tobacco and twisting a new lash on to his whip. He

looked round enquiringly as I resumed my seat. I was almost speechless.

"Doesn't he know any hotels?" Elsie asked a little petulantly.

"Try him yourself," I suggested.

My wife pointed to the hotel. She touched our bags. She gesticulated, as I thought, most eloquently towards the rows of houses and shops. At any rate she made an impression upon the man. He burst into a smile, waved his hat, finished tying his lash, cracked his whip and off we went. He pulled up at last outside another hotel. In I went, hopefully. Out I came in a matter of thirty seconds. I shook my head at my wife and pointed. There was a row of *voitures* a hundred yards long, laden with luggage, extending from the hotel entrance half-way down the street. Her head drooped. In that moment of despair I had an inspiration. I remembered Barcelona.

"Elsie," I enjoined, "put on your mink coat."

She looked at me as though I was raving.

"In this rain?"

"Help Madame," I insisted, turning to the maid.

No one had any strength for resistance. I myself was wearing an overcoat a little shabby, but after all it came from Poole and it was well cut. I discarded my cap and put on my hat; I also put on my gloves and held an umbrella over my wife.

"The Ritz," I told the driver.

He was impudent enough to shrug his shoulders but he cracked his whip and off we went again. The Ritz, it seemed, was in the next street. We drove boldly up to the main entrance. I pointed out the bags to the liveried attendant and entered the hall. A tall pleasant-looking man left his chair behind the desk and came forward to greet us. I handed him my card.

"We want rooms, or a small suite for the night," I told him. "I think I remember you from the hotel in Paris, don't I?"

He smiled delightfully. At least it seemed so to us because it was a smile of welcome.

"I was trained there under Mr. Elles," he observed. "We are very full, Mr. Oppenheim," he went on in excellent English, "but I shall not run the risk of losing this chance of entertaining you. I am a Swiss and I love English novels. I could show you fourteen of yours in my bedroom here."

"I am glad to hear it," I answered. "And I am very glad, too, that you can do something for us. We have had an awful journey."

After that things marched quickly.

"There is only one possible suite," he said, "but it happens to be nearly the best we have. It is at your disposal and I will send your luggage up by the maid. In the meantime, if you will forgive my saying so, your wife and you have an air of extreme exhaustion. If you will not think it presumption I would like to ask you to drink a glass of wine with me before you mount."

"Angel of a man," my wife murmured.

He gave rapid instructions to one of the attending porters, who took the maid under his charge.

"The porter will pay your *voiture*, Mr. Oppenheim," he said, turning to me. "This way, please."

He gave us champagne, this marvellous hôtelier, and I do believe that he was sincere when he said that he was pleased to have us in the hotel. He established us in two easy-chairs, drank our healths and excused himself.

"I am very busy," he explained, "but it was a pleasure which I could not deny myself."

"All my mink coat, I suppose," my wife sighed contentedly as she watched the refilling of her glass.

"Not at all," I replied. "It was the fact of my being a famous writer and my Poole coat."

My wife loves champagne. I like it only moderately. As soon as I was sure that we were alone I arranged an exchange with the barman and was promptly served with

a delicious White Lady. Afterwards we mounted to our apartments, following the young man whom the manager had left outside with the keys in his hand.

We were not to look at the price, he told us. It would be arranged specially by the manager when I paid the bill. We had more wonderful baths and did all that we could to make ourselves a trifle more respectable. Then, though our eyes were still hot and we were still weary, appetite prevailed and we descended to luncheon. The head waiter had already allotted to us a small table in a retired corner where we had a good view of the room and took curious note of the many parties of people lunching. We were served with excellent food and a very pleasant dry white wine which had a character entirely its own. Afterwards there was no help for it, for we nearly went to sleep over our coffee in the lounge, just pulling ourselves together in time to reach the lift. I slept for five hours and my wife for seven.

Sightseeing she would have nothing to do with, so I strolled out alone, visited a couple of cafés and watched the passers-by in the streets. I had paid one previous visit to Madrid, in the days of my youth, and what I saw now simply shocked me. The gaiety of the cafés, the brightness of the streets, the almost swaggering saunter of the good-looking men, the challenge in the eyes of so many of the women I remembered noticing in the restaurants or passers-by in the street, seemed to have completely disappeared. What's wrong with Spain? I found myself wondering. I had asked myself this question a dozen times during my recent journey from Barcelona, and I still found no answer. The Spain of which I have brought home such dreary memories is an unknown country. I remembered with disgust the filthy substitutes for first-class carriages in which we had travelled, asked the question again when I found myself studying covertly the sorrow which seemed printed indelibly upon the faces of my companions, as though they were members of some

suffering and conquered race, and I asked myself once more when we sat, discreetly sheltered, in a corner of the Ritz dining-room that evening what it all meant.

These last impressions were, I think, the most poignant of all. The men, almost all in uniform, had lost every atom of their fresh-coloured complexions, their eyes were sunken and sorrowful. There was conversation enough at many of the tables, but no laughter or gaiety.

What is this scourge that has fallen upon the people? Is it apprehension, the lingering sorrows of the miserable civil war, or is it indeed the dread of some coming cataclysm? To me it was and has remained the greatest puzzle of my journey from the furthest limits of the Alpes Maritimes.

The French peasants showed no sign of any undue depression. The middle classes, the *commis voyageurs*, seemed almost to have recovered their old spirits; even the evacuees—and there were crowds of them in different spots—had a laugh and a jest ready on demand. The Spaniard alone gave one the impression of a suffering race.

At one station in mid-Spain I remember that the train was invaded by several hundreds of flying men, on their way to Madrid, some of them presumably on leave. They talked, it is true, at times, but their voices lacked animation. So it was with the people around me now in the cafés. I went from one to another and it was always the same thing. They talked as a people conversing of lost causes, they spoke the language of a weary, defeated country.

What is underneath it all?

To read the newspapers in French and English, as we had done lately, one would imagine that Spain nowadays was a restored country, firmly decided upon peace and being led by a sure hand in that direction.

Is this the truth, or is this unhappy nation facing a destiny of which the world as yet knows nothing?

Later on that evening, from our sheltered corner of the

dining-room, I was to look out upon the fashionable world of Madrid, and again I wondered. Every third man—I do not think I should be exaggerating if I said every other man—was in uniform. Many had women with them, and there was conversation of a sort, but I never once saw a smile, I never once heard a laugh. The same profound depression seemed to reign here as in the cafés and streets and trains outside.

I asked the hotel manager, who paused to speak to us during his progress around the room, what it meant.

He could do nothing more than shrug his shoulders.

A little later he was a shade more confidential. "The people are afraid that they will be led or dragged into another war," he explained. "Spain has had enough of war. We want peace. We want peace passionately."

I found a few other Spaniards who spoke French before we left for Lisbon the following night, and I believe my friend, the hotel manager, spoke the truth. I believe the Spanish people do want peace. I hope they will get it.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### *The Journey to Lisbon*

FROM nine o'clock the following morning until seven in the evening, with an hour's interval during which I caught a glimpse of the famous pictures for which the city is noted, I did nothing but hang about in the two or three travel offices in Madrid and the station, trying to get sleeping accommodation of any sort on the train to Lisbon that night. I took an interpreter with me and I was willing to do anything reasonable in the way of bribery and corruption. It was all in vain. Mr. Krauss, the hotel manager (his father was Swiss, but his mother was Spanish), joined in the hunt during the afternoon, but it was quite useless. Several times we thought we had succeeded, and then at the last we were told that the Government had claimed the places. In the end we bade farewell to our courteous friend, Krauss, who I think was almost as disappointed as we were at our failure, thanked him for all his kindness and departed for the station. The head luggage porter accompanied us, but when the moment came there was very little he could do. The platform was seething with a huge crowd of would-be travellers who seemed to have brought with them all their household goods and every trunk and portmanteau they had ever owned. The platform was blocked with luggage, there was a terrific hubbub of bawling children and shouting porters, everyone seemed in a desperate hurry and the hand trucks of baggage being wheeled in every direction were in themselves a constant menace. Every person upon the platform—and there must have been thousands

of them—seemed to have made up his or her mind that they were going to travel by this incoming train at any cost to themselves or others. There must have been porters there, for we saw one or two wheeling the trucks, but not one of them paid the slightest attention to us, and the efforts our escort made, by special instruction from his employer no doubt, to interest one of the inspectors in our plight were entirely fruitless.

At last the crucial moment arrived. A wave of agitation passed all along the platform, everyone picked up articles of luggage and prepared for the desperate moment. With a harsh roar, little sparks of fire coming out of the funnel and screams from the engine itself, the huge train lumbered into the station. There was no attempt on the part of any disciplined person to keep the people in order, everyone flung themselves at the train. Our porter was fortunate in that he got his foot placed firmly on the foot-board and, with the rest of us guarding the luggage, he remained there like a limpet. We fought our way to him as the train came to a standstill, and one by one we passed up the things. He flung them through the window into the vacant places, at last succeeded in wrenching open the door of the carriage, and pushed and shoved and shouted like a mad creature until we and about half a dozen others somehow or other found ourselves jammed together in the interior. My wife had a window seat and I was next to her. The maid was just opposite. And, considering all things, we had not done so badly. We managed to open the window so as to get a little air before we started and our luggage was firmly stacked in the racks. There were eight of us in the compartment, including one stout little man happily seated upon the floor, who was smoking a foul black cigar, reading an evening paper and occasionally making the guttural noise of a man about to spit. There was a fat young woman with a baby who had coal-black eyes, who stared at everyone but remained absolutely mute, then and during the greater part of the journey.

There were two soldiers of the National Army and a priest who looked like a walking skeleton, whose complexion was deathly pale and who wore a flat hat of oval shape which must have been the last thing in discomfort but which I never saw him once remove during the whole of the journey.

"How long shall we have of this?" my wife asked.

"Eleven hours, if we are punctual," I told her. "There are the Customs, you must remember."

Elsie groaned.

"Have you any money left?" she asked.

"Nothing to speak of," I answered.

"What shall you do if we are fined again?"

"Pay the fine," I replied. "We'll get out of it somehow."

Then came the first sign of movement. There was a crash which flung everyone out of their places, sent the fat young woman on to the floor and the child into the priest's arms. The little man who was curled up at Elsie's feet rolled over under the seat and was extricated by a push with her feet from the maid. By degrees we all resumed our positions. We had one lesser shock, a piercing whistle, and we were off. The child, who had been claimed by his mother, resumed his place without a smile upon his lips or a tear in his eyes; a more bored-looking specimen of humanity I never saw. His mother, on the other hand, was shrieking and talking at the top of her voice. What she was talking about I have no idea, but I noticed once that the priest, with his eyes half closed, crossed himself, so I imagine that it was blasphemous.

That is how we started off on our journey from Madrid to Lisbon, and of the further developments of that journey I do not intend to say a word because I should offend against a great many canons of polite writing. We jolted out from underneath the roof of the station at twenty

minutes to nine in the morning. At half-past two on the following afternoon we found ourselves in Lisbon station.

Having now completed our journey so far as railway travelling was concerned, and having no more Customs to face—the Portuguese fines amounted to only a few hundred pesetas—we felt justified in considering that our troubles were drawing towards an end. We almost forgot our aching limbs as we limped along the crowded platform, following the genuine uniformed porter who had taken charge of our possessions. As soon as the things were stacked away in a taxi I produced the letter which our friend, Krauss, had given me, addressed to a hôtelier who was a personal friend of his, and we drove cheerfully off into the busy streets.

Before long the chauffeur drew up outside an hotel of prepossessing appearance and we scrambled out. The head porter, however, declined to allow our luggage to be removed until I had interviewed the bureau. I presented my letter there with confidence. A young man in spectacles glanced at the superscription and, carrying it in his hand, departed into an inner office. He returned, followed by an elderly and dignified-looking potentate who addressed us in fluent French. The note, he admitted, was from his well-beloved friend Señor Krauss, but the manager of the hotel to whom it was addressed had been called up for military service two days ago and in his absence nothing could be done. The rooms which we required were, however, in any case unobtainable. Lisbon was at the present moment packed with *voyageurs* waiting for the Clipper and evacuees. At one of the lesser known hotels we might perhaps find accommodation, but he doubted it very much. It was a bad time to visit the city.

We ventured to explain that we were not visiting Lisbon as tourists or for holiday purposes. We were driven there by stern necessity to catch the Clipper to

England. Our friend raised his hands in amazed protest.

"What, you would travel to England!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?" I demanded. "We have tickets, passports, every sort of paper that is necessary; we are all three British and we are returning to our own country."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If Monsieur wishes to go to England," he conceded, "it is not our affair. He is welcome to travel anywhere, but what he cannot do is remain in this hotel. Absolutely, I assure you, the great friends though I know Señor Krauss and the *patron* here to be, if he himself were here he would not be able to accommodate a single additional guest."

All further argument was impossible. We turned sorrowfully away.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "in view of the letter from Señor Krauss, Monsieur would give us the names of some hotels where we could apply."

His gesture was expressive, but he consented. He wrote down hastily the names of five or six hotels on a strip of paper. He consulted another equally severe-looking potentate who, after long contemplation, added two or three other names to the list.

"I hand you this," the man, whom I took to be the deputy manager, explained, "hoping very much that you may succeed in finding accommodation. At the same time, Monsieur, I will tell you frankly my own opinion. I do not believe that there is a single hotel in Lisbon which has rooms of any sort to offer."

We left the place disheartened but not completely discouraged. The list of hotels was formidable. The outside porter, who spoke a little French, presented it to the chauffeur and told him what he had to do. The man first rolled himself a cigarette, then mounted to his place and off we started.

At Elsie's very sensible suggestion, we had obtained

from the porter the name of the nearest restaurant where they were likely to have a *maître d'hôtel* who spoke French. We drove there, provided our charioteer with a moderate sum for his own delectation, and made our way into an attractive-looking café with cushioned seats, spotless table-cloths, shining glass and well-turned-out waiters. With the help of a polite waiter we ordered a meal which, except that the veal turned out to be goat's flesh and the cheese was a species of Rocquefort overwhelmingly odoriferous, was on the whole excellent. We drank some coffee, my wife and I lit cigarettes, and we sallied forth once more on one of the most disheartening quests I ever remember—this attempt to procure rooms in a Continental city which was already full to overflowing.

By the time we had ticked off half the places on the list it began to rain. Our taxi was an open one with no sort of covering, and we were soon practically wet through. My wife absolutely refused to be dumped in a café and we declined to take any notice of the chauffeur, who, with the help of a friendly policeman, endeavoured to persuade us that the search for rooms was useless and that we had better pay our driver and return to the station.

At seven o'clock, by which time our driver was reduced to a constant murmur of profane abuse, mingled with expressions of his hatred for all foreigners, especially English, we pulled up before a building, half ornate, half shabby, on which in letters almost obliterated by time I spelt out the name *Frankfurter Hof*. I descended and made my way, quaking, to a small cracked window. In the hall, redolent with the odours of thousands of meals which must have been consumed in the restaurant across the tessellated way, were piled the sample cases of dozens of commercial travellers. The name inscribed upon every one was German. The announcements which hung upon the walls of the hotel were first in German and then in Portuguese. The whole appearance of the place was absolutely and undeniably German. Nevertheless, both my

wife and I were suffering with cold and were wet through, so I knocked boldly at the window. It was lifted up sharply and a very plump elderly lady whose once-flaxen hair was now almost altogether grey but whose blue eyes had a kindly gleam, looked out at us.

"We want rooms for the night, if you please," I asked.  
"We have been to a great many hotels and we are very wet and tired. Please do something for us if you can."

That woman, German or not, is sure of her place in Heaven. She looked at us in kindly fashion and replied in English.

"We have only three small rooms left in all this large hotel," she confided. "They are not very comfortable, but they are fitted with hot and cold water. But Monsieur perhaps does not understand," she went on; "my husband and I are both Germans and our clientele is mostly amongst the Germans."

"Madame," I assured her, "if you were a Hottentot and your husband a Zulu I should still beseech you to let us have those rooms. We are cold, wet and worn out. It is true that we are English and on our way back to England. But let me the rooms, I beg."

"Ach!" the old lady exclaimed with a smile of sympathy at my wife. "We are all human beings. Fritz," she called out, selecting three keys from a board by her side, "fetch in their luggage and take the lady and gentleman upstairs."

We tottered off. Fritz talked to us all the way with a beaming smile and streams of German, of which I can honestly say I did not understand a single word. He thoroughly understood, however, the gift of pesetas which I handed out to him when we arrived upon the fourth floor and were ushered into the rooms. A slatternly but clean chambermaid showed us the hot water, soap was procured, towels presented and the whereabouts of the bathroom, only a few yards away, indicated. The beds were of the simplest sort possible, the furniture was servants'

furniture. The central heating was going full blast, but the windows opened easily.

"Anna," my wife directed, "take off my shoes, please, find my dressing-gown and turn on the water in the bathroom."

"Aren't you in rather a hurry?" I asked as I prepared to take my departure.

"I am going to get into the bath," she confided.  
"They can't turn us out then."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### *We leave Lisbon in a Storm*

THE Frankfurter Hof Hotel in Lisbon was, or rather is —for it still, I hope, exists—one of the strangest hotels in which I have ever stayed. It had an enormous number of bedrooms but it had no sort of downstairs lounge or sitting-room whatever. There was an entrance hall with hard seats encircling it the whole of the way round, and that was the only sitting-out place there was in the establishment. There was not a corner outside the restaurant where you could obtain a drink, and there were no signs of a bar. Neither was there any café adjoining, or connected with, the establishment, which is nearly always the custom in Spanish and French hotels. On the other hand, the restaurant seemed to be almost illimitable, with tables of various sizes set against the walls and a long one in the middle, broken up here and there into service sideboards. Before I go any further I should like to confess that the food was excellent. We dined there that first evening more out of a spirit of gratitude than with any hope of obtaining a satisfactory meal, and we had an excellent dinner, well served, at half the price, I feel sure, that we should have obtained one anywhere else. We had also a bottle of wine, the best that could be found anywhere in the city. We drank our coffee at the table, looked out into the rain-swept streets and mounted to our rooms. I saw my wife next at eleven o'clock the following morning, dressed for the street, manifestly rested and full of interest.

“ What is the first thing we have to do, Phillips ? ” she asked.

“ We go first,” I told her, “ to the agent of the Clipper

service. After that we go across to Cooks to see if there are any letters, and we might look in at the luggage-forwarding place, although they are not likely to have heard anything about our luggage yet."

"Can we walk?" she enquired.

We tried, but it was difficult. We discovered the crazy pavement, however, or rather the remains of it, which was one of the only things we remembered about Lisbon from a visit while on a yachting cruise many years ago. The beauty of the pavement had largely disappeared; it had become cracked in many places, little squares of the marble had been removed and others had faded. Not far away, whilst struggling to find the Clipper office, we saw the magic sign of Cooks and immediately presented ourselves. There were no letters for us, but one telegram from the Foreign Office in London instructing us to present ourselves at the Embassy. We accordingly got a vehicle outside and drove straight there. I had also a letter to the Ambassador, but I did not wish to present it except under exceptional circumstances, so we just showed the telegram and waited to see what happened. A very pleasant young man, who told us that he was the head of the transport department, very soon made his appearance.

"We heard from home that we were to reserve 'priority' for you at the Clipper station," he confided. "It is already done. If you present yourselves and show your cards you will be despatched in the next possible boat."

This was very good news and we duly expressed our gratitude. We asked a few questions and were told to apply to the offices of the agent.

"In fact," our friend told us, "I should go straight there if I were you and announce your arrival, especially if you are anxious to get off. . . . Will you sign the book before you go? His Excellency will be interested to know that you are in the city."

We begged to be excused. Our explanation was certainly convincing enough.

"We have arrived here," I confided, "without a stitch of luggage. We have been sitting in foul trains for two days and we have no change of clothes whatever. It will take us many, many baths before we really feel that we are clean again."

"I know the feeling," the young man told us as he showed us downstairs. "I have been through it all myself. I came from Baghdad not long ago, and I was obliged to travel on the q.t. It was not too pleasant."

We bade him good-morning and drove off to the Clipper office. There we were passed on to Mr. Berry, a very courteous member of the firm who begged us to make use of him in any way.

"I am extremely glad to hear that someone has had the sense to send you out 'priority' from England," he told us, "for I really do not see how we should ever have got you off without it. There are several parties of official Americans we knew nothing of on their way, also a good many South Americans who want to get back."

"How long do you think we shall have to wait?" Elsie asked.

Our friend smiled dubiously.

"If we get you off in a fortnight," he said, "I should think that would be about the best we shall be able to manage."

"But we haven't the money to stop here that time," I protested. "Our passports only allow us a week anyway. I think we have to report at the police station every day after five days."

"The position," Mr. Berry told us, "is very difficult. There are at least two hundred people waiting here who want to get back. They have no 'priority' so they will have to take their chance, but they are in just the same position as you are for money and with their passports.

We will do everything we can, Mr. Oppenheim, I assure you."

"Tell us exactly what we ought to do to get away at the earliest possible moment," I begged.

The young man was interested.

"Look here," he said, "since you put it that way, I will tell you the proper way to go about it. It is no good coming here every day and asking if you can go on the boat that leaves generally between four and six in the morning. Go down to the docks yourselves every morning an hour before starting time, introduce yourselves to Captain Robins, the departure officer down there, show him your 'priority' notice, see that he gets you down in his own little private notebook—go down every morning as though you expected to start off at once."

"What time must we be there?" I asked.

"Three o'clock," was the brutal reply.

We looked at one another, my wife and I. Mr. Berry nodded sympathetically.

"Of course, I know it's tough," he admitted, "but mind you, this is about the toughest journey you could undertake just now, and it's rotten luck for you that you have to make it. Still, you've asked me to give you the best chance of getting away, and I've told you what it is. First of all, you've got your 'priority,' that's good. Then you've got to pay the forfeit of this terrible state of affairs all over Western Europe—you've got to make a journey that only about a score of people can make every day and that thousands of people have been struggling to make for months. You will have to have a little patience, but everything that can be done shall be done for you."

With that we had to be content. Our friend dismissed us with a shake of the hand.

"There is one thing," he said, looking cautiously around, "one thing more I could say, but keep it entirely to yourselves, please. We are pestered here from

morning to night by people who can't get away and can't pay their hotel bills. They have no claim upon us and have no one who will stand sponsor for them. Naturally, we have to refuse every one. In the case of you two things are entirely different."

Once more he looked cautiously around. Then he leaned a little further over the counter.

"It would be as much as my life is worth," he continued with a smile, "to hand you a bundle of notes across the counter, but I want you to understand that if you are unfortunate about getting away and your money doesn't last out, you need not worry. You will be able to get what you want by applying to me in private and keeping the transaction entirely to yourselves."

We thanked him heartily and took our leave. Money to enable us to remain in Lisbon was not exactly what we were looking for, but at any rate it removed one responsibility.

"Do you think we ought to have asked him anything about a hotel?" my wife asked dubiously.

"I would not dream of it," I declared. "If we have to stay here for a fortnight or a month nothing will induce me to move from where we are."

"I think you are right, Phillips," Elsie agreed. "That dear old lady! I really believe I shall kiss her when we leave."

A great deal for my wife to say, considering that I have never in my life seen her kiss anyone except a very close relative.

We lunched at an exceedingly chic little restaurant in a fashionable street, attracted by the rose-silk blinds in the window, the menu written in French on a small ivory tablet hanging upon the door, and a stout, pleasant-looking man with a fierce black moustache who was standing in the doorway and who wished us *bon jour* as we hesitated.

"French?" I enquired.

He smiled graciously.

"Portuguese, sir," he answered in English. "This is the Restaurant Waldorf, of which you may have heard. I am Portuguese, but I serve the French cuisine. There is no better food in Lisbon. Let me have the pleasure, Madame, of showing you to a table."

We followed him in. He gave us a table in a corner which was comfortably warm but not stuffy, and seeing our eyes wandering towards a miniature bar at the further corner of the room, he hastened away and reappeared with a salver on which were two well-frosted wineglasses filled with what he described as a "Cocktail Portugaise." For a cocktail which contained neither gin nor vermouth, nor any other herb or flavouring that was known to us, we found it exceedingly appetising, but when I asked for the recipe our host, to my surprise, excused himself.

"It is the cocktail of the house," he confided. "I charge for him never. But the secret," he concluded, tapping the bowl of the glass, "I keep that always."

We lunched well and explored the city for several hours. Afterwards we rested and my wife and Anna did a little shopping. Back in the hotel the hall porter was talking to a little old gentleman with short-cropped hair, a kindly voice, very carefully dressed in a frock-coat of ancient pattern, a mauve tie and patent shoes. He bowed to me as I entered.

"It is Monsieur Oppenheim?" he asked. "Ach, that is good. Monsieur speaks German?"

"Not a word, I am afraid."

"That makes no matter. I am Monsieur Helder, the *patron* here. I am German, as Monsieur knows. We are pleased to entertain an illustrious writer even though just at present things are not too happy between our countries."

We talked for a minute or two quite amiably.

"Monsieur is very anxious," he asked, "to proceed on his journey?"

"Very," I admitted. "Fortunate though we are, thanks to your kind hospitality, in having found comfortable rooms, still we are so near the end that we would like to finish."

He put his hand on my arm. With the forefinger of his other hand he carefully punctuated the few words that he addressed to me.

"I have been helping travellers to get away for some time," he said. "I have experience. I will tell Monsieur—it is possible, perhaps, that Monsieur has 'priority'?"

"I have," I confessed.

My host's expression was the expression of a man who has received marvellous news.

"Excellent," he declared. "Excellent. Now, Monsieur Oppenheim, I tell you what to do. I engage for you my taxicab. He is the best that goes and he is never five minutes late. He will be here for you at five minutes to two tomorrow morning, he will take you to the dock, he will wait outside whether it be one hour, two hours, three hours, until he knows whether you have departed or not. If you get away you will leave his fare with the head man there. If not, he will be there to bring you back here to your hot coffee and rolls and another day's waiting. That is good to you?"

"It is wonderful," I told him. "I shall do exactly as you tell me. If you will be so good as to see that your night porter brings our things down at a quarter to two we will follow—and Monsieur, permit me to say that my regret if we fail to get away will be much less since I know that we shall be returning to such hospitable quarters."

Monsieur le Patron bowed. I bowed. We shook hands. Then his wife called him away and he departed, still smiling. What a delightful race these Germans might be!

We dined, lightly but excellently. We avoided coffee and we retired at nine o'clock. By half-past one we were

awakened by a knock at the door. At five to two we found our things stowed away in a comfortable taxicab and we lumbered off to the docks. Our man knew everything he had to do. He brought in our bags, arranged them on a hard bench which completely encircled the inside of a huge barn-like building, unheated except by one small stove and with at least three wide-open doors leading out into black tunnel-like vacancy. He gave us to understand in halting French that he should arrange with someone to tell him if we got off, we paid him his full fare in case we did—and something in the shape of a *pourboire*. He wished us good fortune and withdrew to mix with a crowd of other porters and taxicab men. I then, following out instructions, deposited our passports with the departure officer.

"Any chance of getting off tonight?" I asked wistfully.

"Very doubtful," he answered. "I don't think that we have reached your names yet, but in any case there is a strong wind blowing outside and a lot of rain. It depends upon the tide and the news we get from the other side."

Well, we passed two hours and a half somehow or other. A funny little man, who seemed to speak every language under the sun and was wearing a nondescript naval uniform, prepared tea and coffee in a sheltered corner which he handed around.

"No charge," he explained, when I asked him the price, having pounced upon the tea. "Just what Monsieur cares to give."

So we had two cups of tea for the maid and myself and a cup of coffee for Madame. "What Monsieur cared to give" was, I gathered, satisfactory, as the tea was waiting for us with a double allowance of sugar the next morning as soon as we entered the place.

We talked and dozed until a quarter to six. Then we were brought to attention by the shuffling of feet and the sound of many voices. People were standing up, gather-

ing together their luggage, and the naval gentleman with his list in his hand was coming round.

"No boat will leave tonight," he announced to us as he handed back our passports. "Conditions outside are impossible."

Our taxicab driver was there before we reached the door. We were driven back to the hotel, dry and comfortable, but I was disposed to be morose. Elsie, as usual, was better-tempered in adversity.

"We couldn't expect to get away the first night," she said. "It would have been a miracle. And Phillips, look at the rain!"

I looked out of the window and with a sigh of resignation I decided that we were probably as well off where we were.

The second and third nights were practically repetitions of the first. On the fourth we waited until nearly seven o'clock, as we heard a rumour that one small party of Americans had an urgency claim as well as 'priority.' They got away, but the departure officer would have nothing to say to any of the rest of us. Back we went to the hotel, despondent and miserable.

On the fifth night came the miracle. We were seated about four o'clock in the morning in a semi-comatose state, muffled up in every possible wrap. An icy wind was blowing through the place and the rain itself was sweeping up the open galleries. Most of the space in front of the single stove was taken up by a party of very expensively dressed Brazilians—at least we were told that was their nationality. There were four children, two nurses, a maid, a manservant, a young man and his wife. Hating them like poison, we saw the departure officer come down to them, salute and point down one of the galleries. They made a great fuss about collecting their belongings and servants, but at last they started off. The only consolation left for us was to take their places round the fire, which we promptly did. We heard with dull apathy from the man

in charge of the tea and coffee that they were of the great world, the woman a duchess by virtue of her marriage to the dark, sallow man who was of the Spanish nobility. They were rich enough, we were told, to have travelled in a 'plane of their own. We hated them so much that we sent the man away to get more tea to avoid hearing stories of their wealth and estates. We were seated there, grouped in misery, when we heard a sudden outburst of angry voices, shrill cries of abuse in French and English, and wild peals of childish lamentation. The whole party reappeared ; they were dripping with wet, Madame had lost the silk scarf tied around her head, two of the children had lost their hats, the young man was ghastly with fury. They found the departure officer, who had the appearance of being a somewhat haughty official, and they commenced to belabour him with abuse. I think for the first time in that building we permitted ourselves to smile. We felt somehow that we were getting a little of our own back. And then suddenly the unexpected, joyous happening arrived. Madame la Duchesse, as her maid called her, apparently said one word too much. The departure officer, who had been all courtesy for some few minutes, turned his back upon the whole party and he strode up to where we were cowering over the stove.

"Monsieur Phillips Oppenheim," he said, addressing me.

"Yes ? "

"Are you prepared to depart ? "

"We are ready and very much prepared to depart," I assured him.

He calmly handed me my passport, my wife hers, and my maid hers.

"Straight down the gallery in front," he said, motioning to two of the porters. "The men will follow you with your bags."

We could scarcely believe it, but those words drove us like the lash of a whip. We staggered along until when

we reached the end of the roof we met the full force of the storm in our faces. The stinging of the rain was like an exquisite pain. As for the wind, we simply bent our heads and defied it. My wife clung to my arm, we skidded from side to side of the slippery planks, but we made rapid progress. About a quarter of a mile ahead of us was a dim light burning down in the harbour from the flying-boat. We kept our eyes upon it and we easily out-distanced the porters with the baggage. We drew nearer and nearer. There was an Englishman in sailor's uniform standing at the end like a guardian angel. He held out a brawny hand as we drew near.

"Step carefully here, sir," he shouted to me as we reached the railings. "Wait for your chance. Wait till she comes down and then don't hesitate. I'll have yer hand and the others will pull you in."

Inside I was laughing. I thought of the days when my motor yacht had been the joy of my life, and of the wild times both my wife and I had had boarding her in Garoupe harbour after a dinner at the Cap d'Antibes when we had let the *vent d'est* blow a little too long. My head was in a whirl, but I timed my spring perfectly, was carried on through the cubby-hole and into the arms of two more sailors. My wife followed with equal success. Anna arrived in the arms of the three sailors.

"Bravely done," the pilot who had assisted with our embarkation declared. "This way."

We sat in luxurious chairs, very solid, very unyielding. In some miraculous manner the men half stripped us, produced hot blankets from heaven knows where and rubbed us. It seemed as though in five or ten minutes we were completely dry and glowing with heat. I found myself sipping a tumbler of hot grog, gripping it with both hands, and my wife had some black coffee with a little brandy poured into it. Up and down we went, like a child playing with a ball on a string.

"Bad night," one of the sailors grinned.

"It won't be too bad to get off, will it?" I asked anxiously.

"No, we're going all right," a young officer assured me. "There are a party of three Americans in the saloon aft who insist upon leaving. We shall be all right when we get away from the land wind."

I chuckled with joy.

"God bless the Americans."

The lights were moving! No, it was we. We seemed to be in a turmoil of furious seas. Then up again, moving faster and faster. We were crossing the harbour, facing the open sea. We were off.

I held Elsie's hand tightly.

"We're going!" I exclaimed.

"Phillips," was all she could murmur.

Up and down went the dimly burning lights on the quay-side and outside the spray was like flecks of snow. A moment or two later we were all boxed up. At what seemed to us a tremendous pace, we were cutting our way through the sea. I heard a whisper behind. It sounded like, "Will she rise?"

A half-doubtful, half-affirmative reply.

We sat with our teeth clenched, longing for just one feeling. To have turned back would, I think, have broken our hearts. But we did not turn back. We shot in between a red and a green light and were out on the open sea. A minute or two later and the vibration, the plunging, the roar of the waves were all far beneath us. We were gliding along as smoothly as though we were coasting downhill in a new Rolls-Royce. We were in the air, we were flying—we were flying towards England.

After the joy of finding one's feet on British soil again and hearing the sound of the English voices speaking English—not foreigners struggling with a myth of half-comprehended words—came what, I suppose, was after

all a very natural reaction. Life in a sense recommenced in Poole harbour, after we had landed and made our joyous way into that luxury Customs office where a real English butler astonished us by handing round cups of fragrant tea for which one did not even dream of offering direct payment. There were a few casual but civil questions from an official, a glance at one of our hand-bags, and the examination was over. Not even the disappointment—a very unexpected one—of having the greater part of our English money, which we had jealously hoarded throughout the journey, taken away from us, was able to upset our sense of divine content. We were perfectly satisfied with the assurance that the money would be returned to us by the Bank of England as soon as our passports had been checked up and our identities thoroughly established.

A porter, who I would swear had never been in Spain or tasted garlic in his life, gathered up all our belongings, some person in authority found us out, glanced at our papers, and removed his hat.

“A car is waiting for you outside, sir,” he announced, pointing to a real English limousine.

Rooms, we found, had been taken for us at the Bath Hotel in Bournemouth. We drove along a dimly remembered road, found ourselves in the hall of a large hotel, surrounded by strangers who all seemed anxious to shake hands and welcome us back. Strangers, I had thought, but nothing of the sort! Journalists, local reporters, photographers, all smiling, congratulating us on our arrival, anxious to get in first questions. My wife, for once, deserted me. She fled for the lift, followed by Anna, her faithful attendant. I remained the centre of an eager group whose chief interest in life seemed to be to obtain simultaneous replies to half a dozen feverish enquiries. I succumbed for a few moments, then I asserted myself.

“It is very kind of you to come and welcome me,” I protested, “but wherever you come from or whatever

newspapers you represent, I cannot talk to you all at once. I am willing to tell you everything I can. To begin with, the reason there were so few of us on the *Clipper* was that when we left Lisbon there was a howling gale blowing, and we rather expected to be sent back."

Mr. Horniblow of the *Daily Mail*, already a friend, thrust his arm through mine. He whispered in my ear. I answered a little vaguely but still with a certain amount of decision. What he was saying sounded good. A temporary secretary should be in my salon at seven o'clock. I thought I could finish a short description of our journey from the Alpes Maritimes during the evening. The first manuscript should certainly be his. He shook hands and hurried off, leaving behind an invitation to lunch with him at the Savoy and meet the Editor-in-chief in two or three days' time.

Then the storm of questions recommenced, but I was beginning to feel alive again and I made my own suggestions. I found a comfortable easy-chair in the lounge, ordered the waiter to place other chairs in a semicircle, ordered drinks for everybody, a large whisky and soda for myself, and announced that I was ready to tell anything about my journey that seemed worth while, so long as I could keep awake.

To me there has always seemed to be a certain vagueness about my recollections of the next half an hour or so. Some of those pleasant, eager faces I still remember ; some of them have passed beyond even the pool of memory. I know that I drank with infinite pleasure a real English whisky and Schweppes soda and for the most part I found my little audience content to listen to what I had to tell them, with only an occasional pertinent question. They were all very good fellows (including the young lady), but, on the whole, I was glad that the last convenient train for Town left in three-quarters of an hour, so that my inquisition was a comparatively brief one. After a cordial

exchange of farewells I made my way up to my suite, where I found the valet anxious to take charge of me for the evening. He took away my clothes to brush them—they needed more than brushing—ushered me wearing a borrowed dressing-gown into a bathroom, already filled with steam, and left me to myself for a glorious half an hour. Later on he escorted me into a salon close at hand where a young lady, seated before a typewriter with a fat notebook in her hand and a pile of foolscap paper by her side, was awaiting my arrival. I threw myself into an easy-chair, produced my rough diary and got to work.

“I don’t think you will need to do much in the way of revision,” she assured me. “I have been very careful indeed and I will go through it again on my way back to Town.”

I scanned through a couple of pages and was inclined to agree with her.

“Where did you get the photograph from?” I asked the young lady, looking at an exceedingly flattering likeness of myself already pinned to the first page of the article.

She laughed gaily as she thrust the manuscript into her despatch-case.

“That’s one of our secrets,” she answered. “We have heaps of them at Headquarters. Thank you so much, and goodbye.”

Half-way through a cocktail—my wife clamouring for dinner—a postponement—a finish after a strange, leisurely meal with plenty of good food. Curious strangers coming up and introducing themselves. Nothing much else except a glorious sleep until the arrival of my daughter, son-in-law and grandson in the morning.

More photographers, other visitors, a move to London, an unexpected pull-up by the way, and real bombs falling to welcome us. Slower progress and the sight of bare, gaunt brick walls which had once enclosed a factory—the

stark buildings as we drew near to our London terminus, the labyrinth of barricaded streets on our way to the hotel. Nothing unexpected—the radio had told us all about it—but the actual sight of it all, with the crumbled masses of masonry, was still a shock.

The hotel in Piccadilly—warm greetings, comfort, more good English food ; many indications, however, of the changed times. A scarcity of waiters, the sombrely-clad waitresses, the silence of the streets outside, the fruitless attempt to find friends by telephone—no good—everyone dispersed. Malet Street in the morning ; a new Chief since my last visit, Mr. Duff Cooper, pleasant as ever but less curious than I had expected about the French situation. Impressions, however, are difficult things to handle. I had just come from a year passed amongst the French—an hour or two of almost every day during the first period spent amongst French soldiers, but it was a difficult task to convey just what personal contact with the French during that time had meant. We talked a little about propaganda, I promised a few articles, met one or two of the newcomers and visited some old friends who had rooms in the establishment, arranged a B.B.C. talk to the Forces, and came away.

With memories of the small but intimate establishment in Norfolk Street during the war 1914-18, I left the place with its huge passages, its cavernous depths and its latent lack of friendliness, with a sense of disappointment.

On to the City, passing St. Paul's with a shudder, finding myself a lost waif in Lombard Street, searching amongst barricaded by-ways, charred palings and blackened heaps of masonry for what might remain of a famous bank. Success at last and much satisfaction in grasping the hand of the man who had always been my guide and mentor in all matters of finance, Mr. Noel Robinson, late manager of the Monte Carlo branch of Barclays Bank.

Here I was met with cheering news. My cash balance at Guernsey had been transferred to London in the nick of time with my handful of securities, also the contents of a strong-box at Monte Carlo.

Things were difficult for me but they might very well have been worse. The great disappointment was that the period of rest which I had promised myself for so long a time must now be again deferred. The work which I had hoped to be able to look upon in the future as a gentle and pleasant relaxation must still remain for a time at least a grim necessity. I was told bluntly, in fact, that anyone who could earn even a small income in America and have the proceeds paid to him in England was a man whom the country couldn't afford to do without. It was even hinted to me that a volume of ordinary fiction published in the States was more valuable war work than many columns of propaganda. In the end I left that queer little corner of our stricken City full of hope for the future and not altogether without courage, although I had been warned by a silver-tongued young Government official with charming manners but a somewhat menacing flow of conversation that his department were likely to regard with covetous eyes my carefully hoarded stock of American and Canadian securities.

Back to the hotel and a recital of my woes to my universal comforter.

"You grumble at having to go on working, Phillips," she exclaimed cheerfully. "I shall not sympathise with you. You are always happiest when you are working."

My thoughts flitted away from the rather stuffy room. In a sense my wife was right, but to be a real pleasure work must be done in the right surroundings. I have always liked to combine my busy periods with the tranquil atmosphere of home life,—to write out-of-doors in a garden with bright-coloured flowers, sweet with perfume, and a soft breeze trickling through the bending boughs

of the trees ; or, if the weather was unkind, in a study with some of my treasures around, with books up to the ceiling, and a sympathetic secretary. The right environment is, after all, necessary to give colour to the mood, and how can you find colour or the right incentive to your imagination in the guest-houses or hotels of English watering-places, small or large, with probably a bored young lady a few feet away from you with one eye on her Remington and another on the clock !

" They aren't all like that," my wife, who is a confirmed optimist, protested. " Besides, you ought to remember how kind everyone has been to us since we found our way home."

That indeed was the truth. I thought of my publisher, Percy Hodder Williams, struggling with his own difficulties in life, having been bombed and obliged to transfer his whole organisation into the country, who had still found time to cancel another engagement and give me luncheon on the previous day. Not only luncheon did he offer me but encouragement, pleasant words and a generous attitude towards all the small problems which had arisen during my absence. I remembered too the kindly letters and help I had also been receiving from my American publishers, and the welcoming cable of congratulation which I had received almost before we had arrived in the country. Then there was Robinson at the bank. They were all doing their best to remind us of the brighter side of life, and even if the worst should happen, we were back in our own country, which, after all, was the best and most fitting place for us. I think we both felt like most of the others who were fortunate enough to reach home a little before or after us, that if the threatened invasion of our country should really happen, we would sooner be here and in the thick of it than learn about it on the radio, or read about the horrors with which we had been threatened in the newspapers.

So we made up our minds to face the fact that we were

homeless and essay the life of vagabondage in guest-houses and hotels. My wife left London on a short visit to our daughter and son-in-law, who had sought a safer habitation than their cottage in Kent. I was thankful that she went, for she missed the two great blitzes of the middle of May. I was at the Splendide for both, and on the roof of the hotel during a part of the second one, taking the place for a short time of a slightly injured observer. I am afraid that for two or three days afterwards I sank to the level of a tourist sightseer, for I could not resist joining with many others in visiting the various areas of destruction. It did me this much good, however. The discomforts of life as we were experiencing them were not worth a single murmur of discontent in comparison with the real sufferings endured by thousands of our fellow citizens at this time. I felt that our feeble complaints were both unworthy and undignified.

I pass over a few months which were amongst the dreariest of my life—comfortless and sad. There was always a ray of light ahead though—the beacon light of a coming event which, curiously enough, was of no importance to anyone except our two selves.

The day arrived—August 6th—we travelled up to London from the villa where we were living as paying guests, and during the afternoon, whilst my wife was out shopping with our daughter, I paid a visit to our old friend Charles, who has charge of the restaurant at an hotel we used to love in the old days, and took him by force into my confidence under a pledge of secrecy.

“I only tell you this,” I said, as I divulged the secret, “because we are going to drink champagne tonight and I haven’t seen a bottle of champagne on anyone’s table for more than a year.”

“You will see it tonight, Mr. Oppenheim,” he said, “and you will see something else that is absent from my tables nowadays.”

So, at half-past eight that evening, we dined at a carefully chosen table in a sedate corner of what was once our favourite restaurant, with Pommery of a famous vintage in coolers by our side and a wealth of flowers upon the table, my wife and I, our daughter and her husband. We drank many toasts to one another, but it was impossible for us to wish one another many happy returns of the day, because it was August 6th, the fiftieth anniversary of our marriage.

A different strain of music from the small orchestra in the distance. I found myself listening intently. It was a familiar tune. I turned towards my companion.

“ Shall we dance ? ”

She laughed, perhaps with a faint note of gentle mockery. But our feet were already moving to the music.

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